

A. Society mother



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A Society Mother.



"Very well; I dare say we shall meet to-morrow night." Her voice was utterly indifferent.

"What do you think of him?" inquired D'Enville. Elated with his success, he was on the best of terms with himself and ready to be pleasant.

"He is a strong man, who will allow nothing to stop him, Charles. Are you in his power?"

He laughed. "What a notion! As if he was likely to harm me, even if he could. We are very good friends now, and there is no reason we should not continue so. I have instructed Mr. Brabourne to place another five hundred to your credit every year on the strength of it, anyhow."

She shivered, though the room was hot, and got up.

"I hope it is all right. That's all. Thanks for the money, it will be useful. *A demain.*"

"So long," he returned, "sleep well."

He let himself out and descended the stairs. Summoning a passing hansom, he gave an address in South Kensington and drove off through the night. Upstairs, Mrs. D'Enville rang the bell and ordered the man to shut up. She went to her bedroom, opened a desk, and examined some papers with a vague idea of going through her accounts. But after a few minutes she desisted, and sitting down again, let her thoughts wander back through her youth to childhood, and then again tried to conjecture whether her path was laid for her future.

Meanwhile

was a girl

lit

his destination.

to

test



public, and many were the speculations as to her character indulged in by the gossips assembled in conclave or in comfortable duologue in each other's houses. It is unnecessary to state that the lady had no remnant of character left since she chose to keep her affairs to herself and declined to make the acquaintance of any of her neighbours. No doubt she richly deserved the confidential innuendoes which reflected so gravely on her reputation, but neither she nor the reputation were affected.

Charles D'Enville opened the front door with a latch-key and went upstairs without removing his hat and coat. He entered a room facing the top of the stairs, throwing the door back quickly, and called out :

"Here we are, Clare."

A tall graceful woman, untidily dressed in a loose but obviously expensive tea-gown, rose from a sofa. She fitted the room somehow. Both gave an impression of money badly spent. The furniture was luxurious, but in execrable taste, and the woman wore woollen bedroom slippers on her feet, and her hands were loaded with costly rings.

These last constituted her only real extravagance, and she had bought them all herself, save one which D'Enville had given her. For fifteen years she had been in demand, at a salary of never less than forty pounds a week, for leading parts in musical comedy ; for she was beautiful in her own large, rather flabby way ; she possessed a sweet contralto voice of great purity, and she could dance gracefully. Her intellect was negligible, her mind as simple and unsophisticated as that of a child. There were only two passions in her life. The careful saving of half her earnings—from a well-remembered horror of

early days of fearful poverty in a small provincial town—and Charles D'Enville, who had chanced to be attracted to her on her first appearance. She was easy-going and good-natured, but all other men—she necessarily had many admirers of all ranks—failed to interest her, and no one else had ever succeeded in supplanting him. Her one idea was to get through her nightly performance, which, thanks to a splendid constitution, never affected her health, and return home quietly to read a novel till bedtime—or the arrival of Charles D'Enville.

She was entirely devoted to him, and she suited him perfectly. He went to her house to be absolutely free of all constraint or necessity to consider anything but himself. A clever woman could not have endured him for a week, but Clare was incapable even had she desired, of understanding character. He was always nice to her, he gave her occasional presents and as much of his society as he had time for. She asked nothing more, expected nothing more.

To-night she greeted him affectionately, removed his hat for him and his coat, then led him to her sofa, where they sat down.

"I've been having an important dinner-party," he announced.

"Have you, dear? With that woman there?" She always referred to Mrs. D'Enville in this way from a vague notion that she occupied her place, also that she should be, though she was not jealous.

"Oh yes. Of course. But my fortune's made;" he patted her hand kindly. "I shall be a millionaire before I know where I am."

Her face fell. She never told him that by now she possessed a large sum, wisely invested by her solicitor, which she had saved for all these years. In fact, she was a rich woman. But she had no idea what to do with her money--she hoped in an uncertain way that she and Charles would spend it together in some quiet spot when she retired from her profession and his wife was dead. The fact of his making a fortune did not please her. She feared he might drop her, for, though she had not the capacity to analyse her motives, her instinct told her he was utterly wrapped up in himself, and would never consider her for one moment if it suited him to leave her. She worried unnecessarily over this, for D'Enville was absolutely content with her, and likely to remain so. He was getting on in life and appreciated comfort, and he knew he would never find anyone else to make an idol of him or invariably to put him first as she did. He recognised this fact with considerable complacency.

"Aren't you rich enough?" she asked.

"Not at all; no one is rich enough."

"I am," she interrupted quietly.

"You are a marvel," he declared. "I believe you are the most easily satisfied mortal on earth."

"When I've you," she responded, with so much feeling that she forgot the aspirate, which was rare with her.

And thus Charles D'Enville passed what he considered a thoroughly satisfactory day. Leonardson, in his richly furnished bedroom off St. James' Street, felt that his plans moved. Mrs. D'Enville, oppressed by some weight as of a gathering storm, tossed restlessly, unable to sleep; and Harry, the boy at Eton, looked forward eagerly to seeing his

mother the next day, with no troubles in the world beyond the anxiety consequent on a slight doubt as to whether he would actually obtain his "Field," the school football colours, or not.

CHAPTER IV

Lady Mulford looked up from her letters as Mrs. D'Enville dashed into the room, flinging the door wide open. She was accustomed to these incursions, and betrayed no astonishment. It was unusual for Maie to be anything but excitable when she was in good spirits.

"Well, Maie dear, how are you?"

"Oh, Connie, such a piece of luck! Charles has discovered a new millionaire."

"You don't mean it!" said Lady Mulford serenely; "do I stand on my head?"

"Try and be sensible, if you can——"

"If I can!" ejaculated the lady thus adjured. "Sit down, after first shutting the door, there's a good creature."

Mrs. D'Enville did as requested, and assumed a position on the edge of the writing-table.

"He is presentable, to start with. His wealth is enormous and rapidly becoming fabulous, his antecedents shrouded in mystery——"

"And so the more interesting," interjected Lady Mulford.

"Exactly—and he appears to be anxious to enter society," concluded the visitor, ticking off the items on the tips of her elegant gloves.

"Poor man," Lady Mulford commented.

"He may be before he's done," agreed the other, "but at present it is poverty of friends that affects him."

"If he is as rich as you say, there should be little trouble on that score."

"Don't be sarcastic, Connie. I am sure everyone will be delighted to know him."

"I don't doubt it for a moment. But to what am I indebted for this invasion?"

"That is just the point. Mr. Leonardson."

"Leonardson?"

"Howard Leonardson is his name."

"Oh!"

"It suits him admirably," said Mrs. D'Enville.

Lady Mulford spread out a hand with a gesture which recalled Leonardson's own trick, and Mrs. D'Enville laughed.

"What else does one expect? He is not American."

"Well, he is no worse for that. Americans tire me, they are so strenuous. Are you sure you aren't half-American yourself, Maie?"

"I won't keep you much longer from your correspondence," returned Mrs. D'Enville. "This Leonardson man is strenuous enough, I should imagine; but it is the power of the tiger, not the elephant."

"Are Americans elephants as a rule?"

"America is, I always think a great blundering place where they can do nothing except in extremes, and go crashing about knocking everything down."

"So your new lion—or tiger—is of the velvet glove variety. I should like to meet him."

"My dear, that is precisely what I am here for. He dined with us last night, and suggested taking

you and me down in his new Daimler to Eton this afternoon. Of course I accepted at once ; in this weather a railway journey is even more unpleasant than usual. If they heat the carriages they are like ovens, and if they don't my toes congeal."

Lady Mulford smiled. "That's all right, then. I am sure I much prefer the motor."

"We'll call for you after lunch—about two-thirty. Er, by the way, Connie——"

"Yes?"

"Is your party complete for the shoot after Christmas?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Probably not. Why?"

"If you are a gun short I should rather like Mr. Leonardson invited—of course, if there's room. You won't mind my asking?"

The other laid her hand kindly on Mrs. D'Enville's. She was fond of her and sorry for her, and was always ready to oblige her friends if she could.

"I will have a look at him this afternoon. I expect it can be managed. Have you known him any time?"

"Charles dug him up in the City the other day. You see, he has helped him on to some board or other, and we want to do something for him in return. I don't remember if Frank goes in for business, but, anyway, Mr. Leonardson is certain to be snapped up directly he is hatched out—so to speak—and you may be glad to get first bite."

"I suppose he can shoot? Mulford is rather particular."

"Oh yes, he's a splendid shot, I believe," Mrs. D'Enville asserted, drawing a bow at a venture. She had not the vaguest notion, but the great thing

was to secure the invitation. Besides, Leonardson was not the sort of man to give himself away through ignorance of how to behave.

"I am very glad to hear Charles has got a good thing," said Lady Mulford kindly, as she turned to her writing again, "and I will expect you and your 'tiger' at half-past two."

"Thanks so much, dear," responded the other, stooping and kissing her cousin. "You are a brick."

"Tigers have claws," replied Lady Mulford, "and teeth."

"Let us hope they will remain sheathed and covered; this side of the City," called back Mrs. D'Enville lightly as she left the room.

Harry D'Enville was out when his visitors arrived. They went up to his room, which was littered with garments, and his mother found a note saying he had to play football, but would be back at 4.30. Would they wait or go and watch? He added that Lady Mulford's son was similarly occupied, and they accordingly decided to go and watch, as the afternoon was fine. Both boys were in the same house.

"It is a funny place, Mr. Leonardson," remarked Lady Mulford as they emerged from the house, "and new to you, I dare say."

"Yes, I have not been here before," he replied.

"Harry likes it very well," Mrs. D'Enville said; "he can stay two more 'summers,' as he puts it, and hopes to get into the Eleven next year. Cricket, you know."

"Indeed!" Leonardson observed politely. He was not interested beyond a general desire to understand things.

They strolled past the new schools with the cannon in the yard, and along the Slough Road till they reached the famous enclosure known as "Lower Sixpenny" in summer, and the "Field" in winter. Mrs. D'Enville often ran down to see her boy, and knew her way about the place. He was the only serious interest in her life, and they were mutually devoted to each other. His father, Harry seldom saw, and was on almost formal terms with. They were good friends, but nothing more. The boy regarded him as a rather wonderful being, and felt a certain pride in his reputation as a man of the world who went everywhere and knew everybody. His mother was different. He treated her as a kind of irresponsible, delightful person, whose son he happened to be and who required a good deal of looking after. This attitude afforded her much pleasure, mingled with tolerant amusement, and she allowed him to arrange things for her, so long as he did not interfere too much.

Having climbed a stile in the corner of the "Field" and taken up a position on the ground, they stood for some time while the two ladies admired the prowess of their respective progeny. It was a quaint scene, and Leonardson soon found it monotonous. He derived no satisfaction from watching twenty-two youths in variegated shirts and stockings alternatively struggling for and running after a rather small-sized ball. Few spectators lined the field of play besides themselves, for it was only an ordinary game. At the far end of the ground the famous fivescourts met the eye, and to the right stretched flat, uninteresting fields; while on the left was a wall, on which hung the coats and scarves of the combatants. In the December

light it was a grey, sombre picture, only enlivened by the bright colours of the boys' caps, shirts, and stockings.

Presently to Leonardson's relief, the game came to an end. The players donned their coats and wrapped the long, coloured, woollen scarves round their necks ; the spectators tailed off, some past the fivescourts and some over the stile by which our party had entered. Then two boys separated from the group by the wall and joined them. One, short thick-set and dark, went up to Lady Mulford and greeted her calmly.

"Hullo, mother," he said, "here you are ! We didn't know what time you would arrive so thought we might play."

Meanwhile, the other, a tall, rather slender but wiry-looking boy with light hair and an open face lighted by curious hazel eyes, kissed Mrs. D'Enville, affectionately—but in a slightly restrained way, as if ashamed of such demonstrativeness.

"Yes, we would have stayed in, if you had said the time," he added apologetically, "only you see it's rather important not to miss a game. We are both awfully keen to get our 'Fields,' and though K. is a certainty, I can't afford to lose any opportunity."

"Rot," responded Lord Kirby ; "I only wish I had half as good a chance as you."

"I hope you will both get your 'Fields' safely," Lady Mulford said, smiling ; "are they likely to be arable or pasture ?"

"Oh, rot, mother," her son rejoined ; "you know better than that."

"They are the school football colours, I believe," explained Mrs. D'Enville to Leonardson. "Harry,

let me introduce you to Mr. Leonardson, a friend of your father's—and mine," she added.

Harry shook hands with the stranger, taking stock of him at the same time. He wondered who this dark, sleek man might be, and he was not drawn to him at first sight.

"Looks like a nigger," he observed to himself.

"And my son, Kirby," said Lady Mulford.

Harry took his mother's arm and led the way off the ground. He glanced back over his shoulder and noticed the others were a little way behind.

"Who's your black friend?" he inquired.

"Hush, Harry. He will hear you. He is the latest thing in millionaires——"

"He looks it," chimed in the boy, with the directness of the youthful idea of humour.

His mother smiled. The remark was apt enough.

"He is an important person, as far as we are concerned, and his influence is considerable in financial circles."

"Oh," said Harry, "what has that got to do with us?"

"He has helped your father to get on to a very good company, and he can do a great deal more if he likes."

"A sort of Pierpoint Morgan or Rockefeller?"

"Yes."

"And what does my respected parent propose to do for him in return?"

"My dear Harry——"

"Oh, I wasn't born yesterday," he squeezed his mother's arm, "though you may think it, my precious infant of a mamma."

"I perceive," she rejoined, "that you are a precocious infant of a son, I don't know about precious."

"Funny joke," chaffed Harry. "But where do we come in, anyhow?"

"I fancy Mr. Leonardson would like to know more people than he does——"

The boy whistled. "So that's the game. Father's going to 'father' him on Society—with a big S."

"Harry, really."

"Not a bad notion either, if he pays well."

"Harry!"

"All right, my dear, I wish you joy of him."

Mrs. D'Enville stopped and waited for the others. She was laughing, and her eyes were soft as she looked at her son. "You are a regular D'Enville," she declared, "I regret to say."

"Leave out the 'n,' dearest, in the usual good old way," he muttered, as the rest of the party joined them.

"Mr. Leonardson is kind enough to say he will come to our shoot after Christmas," said Lady Mulford, "so we shall all meet there again."

Harry emitted a low whistle.

"Whatever is the matter, Harry?" inquired his mother.

"K. trod on my foot," declared he, eyeing the gentleman in question.

Before "K." could reply to the accusation, Mrs. D'Enville hurriedly resumed:

"Are you giving us tea, or shall we have the honour of taking you both out?"

"We have laid in supplies," Harry answered.

"I hope you are all coming;" he included Leonardson with his glance.

"Thanks," said the latter, "I should much enjoy an Eton tea."

They entered the house and climbed the stairs, walked along the bare passage past boys in football clothes with hot-water cans, and boys, already changed, in black coats, till they came to Harry's room again. It was a small apartment, furnished principally with a plain table, a folding-bed, a cupboard or two, and a combination bureau-bookcase-chest-of-drawers. There were a couple of comfortable wicker arm-chairs and several wooden ordinary ones. On the walls hung some water-colours, a few sporting prints, and various house, cricket and football groups. There were also one or two coloured ribbons fixed to the wall with drawing-pins—signs of prowess at games.

The table was laid for tea, and several paper bags from shops lay about, obviously containing food.

Harry collected his garments calmly.

"I will have a bath and change in K.'s room," he said, "if cousin Connie won't mind staying in here."

He departed with Lord Kirby, and they returned in a surprisingly short time, attired in the regulation tail-coat of Eton boys, with a turn-down collar and white evening tie—somewhat reminiscent of waiters in a provincial hotel.

Then a couple of small boys arrived and proceeded to empty the contents of the bags on to plates. They made tea and brought in eggs in two or three forms. There were cakes in plenty, pots of jam and cream in jars. Altogether the table was pretty well covered.

"Who are your fags?" asked Mrs. D'Enville.

"Mine is young Kingsteignton and——"

"What, the present duke?" asked Leonardson.

"Yes."

"His father was a colleague of mine at one time in the City."

"Was he clever?" inquired Harry.

"Oh—er—well, he was a man of sound judgment, if not of great intellect."

"His son also displays sound judgment in shirking his fagging," Harry announced, "and I have failed so far to discover any vast intellect."

There was a laugh, and Lady Mulford said:

"The family is hardly famous for brains in these days."

"K.'s fag is Keemer. His father has that shop where you get your boots from, mother. He's as clever as they make 'em, and a very decent chap. Last half I had an Indian rajah."

"Your society is cosmopolitan," commented Leonardson.

"Oh," said Kirby, "it doesn't much matter who a fellow is, so long as he is good at games—work is quite another thing."

"Do we conclude that Mr. Keemer is a budding athlete as well as clever?" queried Mrs. D'Enville.

"You cynical lady," remarked her son, "but you happen to be correct."

The object of their remarks here entered with a plateful of toast, which he deposited on the table.

"You may go," said Harry, and the boy finally departed.

"Are we to dispose of all these wonderful dishes?" his mother demanded in an anxious voice.

"You needn't strain yourselves. K. and I don't have another meal, and you can enjoy the privilege of seeing us eat."

Leonardson did not say much. He watched Harry with interest, however. The lad puzzled

him somewhat. His face was not strong, and he was certainly easy-going. Yet his eyes had a steady look in them, and while he was playing football, Leonardson had noticed his jaw was set almost grimly. He realised that Mrs. D'Enville was wrapped up in him, as much as she could be in anybody except herself, and undoubtedly he must reckon with him in any calculations connected with the mother.

Meanwhile, the two hosts consumed seemingly endless supplies of eggs, buttered and boiled, with the appetite engendered by an hour's real hard exercise.

The others ate some cake, drank tea, and marvelled. Tea at Eton is a serious affair, as, generally speaking, it is the last meal of the day—supper being a negligible quantity. Accordingly, the boys make the most of it.

"Everything you see here, except the tea, sugar, bread-and-butter," announced Lady Mulford, "comes originally from the pockets of long-suffering parents. Now you know why Eton is such an expensive school."

Lord Kirby stopped with a forkful of buttered eggs half-way to his mouth.

"You must be the despair of your dressmaker," he managed to pronounce, promptly completing his fork's journey.

"K. is becoming so extremely humorous," said Harry, "that I am nervous about allowing him out."

Not being capable of a reply for the moment, Kirby merely spluttered.

"I suppose you used to behave in much the same way in your time?" said Lady Mulford to Leonardson.

"My education was completed in a sterner school,"

he replied. "I was quite an experienced man of business when I was seventeen."

Harry looked up with a quizzical smile, as if about to speak, but he thought better of it.

"Ah, I am afraid Harry will never make much money," his mother broke in, with an affectionate look at the individual in question, "he is too fond of spending it."

"Inherited—from the female side," the accused retorted.

"I am not so sure," Leonardson observed. "Mr D'Enville strikes me as not lacking in some of the qualities which make for success in finance. I observed he secured the major portion of the buttered eggs in the most unscrupulous manner."

Harry laughed good-humouredly. "That's because K. talks so much," he explained.

"Not at all," said Kirby, "it's because you eat so jolly fast."

At last the feast perforce came to a conclusion from absence of material for its continuance, and the visitors decided they must be making a move.

"I shall see you directly after Christmas, my darling," said Mrs. D'Enville.

She and Harry were alone for a minute or two, while Leonardson went to see Kirby's room.

"I wish you could come to Uncle Henry's," the said wistfully. "I am sure he would be all right if you wrote."

"He would ask us all to go to Stoke D'Enville, your father might go, but they haven't spoken for years now, and I doubt it."

"I hate going without you, mother, although we get on well enough. He is a real friend to me."

"I'm glad to hear it, darling. I hope, with all these things of Mr. Leonardson's, we shall be able to go and live at Mitchet one of these fine days, then you will have a real home."

The boy did not answer for a moment. Then he said :

"I don't like him, he is too——" he paused for a word.

"Well, what is he, too?" she smiled quizzically.

"Too sleek and too black," Harry concluded.

"Nonsense, you don't know him. I hope you will like him better when you see more of him at Mulford."

"He's a bounder, as well," Harry persisted.

"Don't abuse him, Harry. He may make our fortunes, and he has been very kind as it is."

"I can't help my feelings," he responded. "Why is he coming to Mulford? Did you get him asked?"

"I want you to be friends with him," she answered. "Yes, I asked Connie to invite him."

"Well, we will see how he shoots," announced the boy, with the confidence of one who has been allowed a gun himself for nearly two whole seasons. "If the beggar's going to do all that for us, there must be something in it. Here they are."

The adieux were effected. Leonardson shook hands heartily with Harry.

"I hope we may be friends," he said.

"I hope so too," the boy replied, without much warmth, however.

The motor glided purringly through the well-lit precincts of the school. Inside the Limousine body they were warm and snug, well protected from the raw winter air. A few boys were out, with books under their arms, going to "extras," but the place

wore a deserted air. On the right lay boarding-houses, broken by Keat's lane, and on the left, inside the low barrier wall along the pavement, the college buildings, the school-yard and the end of the fine old chapel. A moment later they crossed Barnes pool bridge and passed along the narrow street between that and Windsor Bridge. Here the car turned to the left, designing to reach London by way of Datchet.

Lady Mulford was dropped at her house in Prince's Gate, so Leonardson was alone with Mrs. D'Enville for the remainder of the journey. She was conscious that his eyes were fixed upon her.

"You are very beautiful, Mrs. D'Enville," he said quietly, at length.

She laughed nervously. "You are very polite, Mr. Leonardson."

"Sincerely so."

"Thanks."

"I have thought so for some time," he resumed.

She put her hand up to her chin and leaned forward, her elbow on her knee.

"Let us be serious. What do you think of Harry?"

"I was serious—but, never mind. He is a charming boy."

"He is all I have in the world," she said softly, almost unconsciously.

Leonardson had spoken slowly and lowered his voice. She seemed to feel his presence strongly—as one feels when the air is charged with electricity.

"I beg your pardon," she continued with an effort, "I was thinking."

"So I perceived."

"He is a dear boy. I hope he will get on."

"What is he going to do?"

"Oh, the Guards, I suppose. We ought to be able to afford that—now," she added.

"I am a good friend," he said. "May I consider myself as one of yours?"

"I should be glad." She glanced at him. "I think you would make a bad enemy."

"There can be no question of that between us. By the way, I must thank you for my invitation to Mulford Abbey."

"Oh, that is nothing. I am only too happy—as a slight return——" She hesitated.

"Let us clinch the bargain," his voice was quite grave, but he looked at her rather mockingly; "it is not an uncommon arrangement, I believe. I can well afford to pay, and I shall not forget my sponsors in this new department of life. Leaving all personal feeling on one side, I am desirous of knowing your associates, and you are not unwilling to increase your income. We can each do for the other what is required. Your husband and I understand one another. Why should not you and I work together on a financial basis also? As a commencement, since it is through your personal endeavours that I am going to Mulford, let us put the equivalent cash value at five hundred pounds."

Mrs. D'Enville was taken aback. This was plain speaking, if no more than the facts. The idea struck her as quite fair. She would be paid for what she did. Since they were to take on the proposition, as she phrased it to herself, it was not unreasonable that she should obtain a share as much as Charles. Their own money matters were arranged on a simple footing. She got the interest of the marriage settlement—fifteen thousand pounds

at three per cent.—and goodness only knew how she had contrived to last so long upon this absurdly inadequate sum. Five hundred would be more than useful to her. She hesitated a moment only.

“We must have a triangular agreement?”

“By all means,” said Leonardson. “Mr. D’Enville will naturally be consulted.”

“It is generous of you, I think,” she went on.

“I am only doing what is well worth my while,” he responded; “it is the fairest way all round. I shall judge what any particular transaction is worth and pay accordingly.”

She laughed. Having set her foot on this path there was no reason to look ahead for trouble. Charles would know of the arrangement, and she did not see how it could affect anyone else. She never analysed things very deeply, but, like many other people, glanced cursorily, as it were, over the facts as they presented themselves to her, and unless some very strong objection was patently in evidence, proceeded to act as she felt inclined—trusting to good luck and a certain superficial resourcefulness to extricate her from any undesirable developments.

“A sort of sliding scale, I suppose,” she declared. “So much for the various grades of our wonderful aristocracy. I like candour—and your methods certainly appeal to me, Mr. Leonardson. Are you going to entertain?”

“Next season I shall move to Carlton House Terrace, and I fancy, if we manage well, the house will not be empty.”

“Why have you never gone out before?”

“I was not ready.”

“And you are now?”

"Perfectly. Shall I do you credit?"

"Yes," said Mrs. D'Enville, "you are not a man who could be ignored, wherever you might be."

"We shall naturally see a good deal of one another."

"I suppose so."

"The prospect is not distasteful to you?"

His voice suddenly vibrated in a peculiar way. She knew that his eyes were devouring her again. They were almost home now, and she did not want to think. The man admired her. She was used to admiration, had almost lived on it for years, and—so far—she had not singed her wings in the flame. Surely she could manage this *nouveau riche*; keep him from bolting? A light hand would be required; she must ride him on the snaffle—he would never stand the curb. There was a directness about him which she recognised as potential for trouble if occasion arose. The excitement of manœuvring against an unknown force seized upon her—a force different from any she had encountered heretofore, possibly too strong—but that remained for the future to disclose, and enhanced the excitement.

"I hope we shall always be very good friends." She held out her hand ungloved. "Good-night, thanks so much for motoring us down to Eton."

"Good-night," responded Leonardson, taking her hand in a strong grip. "Friendship is always a step in the right direction." He released her and got out of the car, holding the door open.

"We shall meet again very soon," he said. "I will call to-morrow at three; we can settle the details of our compact."

- "Splendid," she answered, smiling. She had lost the slight sensation of nervousness induced by being shut up in the car alone with him. "I shall be in. It seems like a page out of the 'Arabian Nights,' with you as one of the genii."

"I shall always be at your call," he said gravely.

CHAPTER V

Stoke D'Enville took its name from an old Norman race which had survived through the turbulent periods of English history. Ralph, the first lord, was summoned to attend one of those early councils at the end of the thirteenth century which included the great warriors and important landowners of the day. Since that time the family had gone on, once or twice harking back to an uncle or aside to a brother, but continued in the male line through some twenty odd generations. Behind the above-named Ralph stretched mysterious figures of feudal lords, back, it is said, to a shadowy knight supposed to have possessed the fief of Enville in Normandy, and thence to have journeyed in the train of the adventurous William.

Whether records would substantiate all the claims to antiquity set forth by the voluminous pedigree stored away in the muniment room or not is immaterial. What is certain is the fact that for sheer descent as a noble house the D'Envilles could compete with the oldest and greatest in the country.

The present lord, only brother of our acquaintance, Harry's father, was twenty-third of his line and an individual of uncommon character. He resided with his two small sons, devoting himself entirely

to them. In the shooting season alone did he entertain strangers to four or five "bachelor" parties—that is, no ladies ever entered the house. The reason for this exclusiveness might be considered adequate or not. As a young man Lord D'Enville was gregarious enough. He left Eton for Sandhurst, whence he entered a crack regiment. Well-off, good-looking and his own master at twenty-one, he naturally figured as one of the important young men of his day. Then, after fifteen years, during which he lived as his fellows, he married a young girl, beautiful, clever, and as well-born as himself. For nearly three years more he existed for her, spending himself and his money, regardless of discretion, to please her every whim. By that time he was the father of two sons, his estates were considerably mortgaged, and he longed for a quiet life at home.

His wife had other views—her sole conception of existence appearing to be a constant round of gaiety and dissipation. With the graceful nonchalance which characterised her, she entertained lavishly and successfully during her career as Lady D'Enville. Her parties were select, her dinners the meeting place of the smartest and most advertised members of the younger set. She was probably the most popular young hostess of the day and the most sought after. No function was complete without her and her husband; they were regarded as evidence of the survival of marriage as a possible covenant; held up as examples of how a couple could enjoy life and yet remain untouched by any whisper of gossip.

One day the world of fashion was astonished to learn that a grave scandal had arisen in its midst.

The whited sepulchres raised outraged eyes to heaven, the charitable breathed a sigh for another illusion gone, and the affair dropped into the order of past *causes célèbres*. Before her marriage, it had been known that Lady D'Enville cherished a romantic attachment for a young subaltern in the same regiment as Lord D'Enville ; but, as the gentleman in question possessed an income by no means compatible with matrimony, of course nothing could come of it, and she was considered eminently sensible to have forgotten so completely this girlish fancy.

No one had dreamed that the object of it could possibly come in for the vast estates his cousin owned. There were four lives between when she married Lord D'Enville—yet this event occurred within three years.

On the same day Horace Childe sent in his papers, Lady D'Enville met him at Charing Cross and departed for a year on the Continent, leaving a note expressing her regret and hoping her husband would forgive her on the score that no one could possibly have anticipated that two brothers would be killed in a motor smash, one young man die of appendicitis and another of pneumonia in three years. She apologised for the vagaries of fate, and trusted he would permit them to put the seal of respectability on their union after the customary six months had elapsed. If the unforeseen had not occurred, she added, she would have continued to enact her part in the same way she always had.

Lord D'Enville carried out every wish of his wife punctiliously. Till matters were arranged he went about as usual, betraying no emotion. Then he, too, sent in his papers and blotted himself off the

face of his world. Alone, with no interest in life but his two boys, he lived in seclusion at his old home. Disappointed and embittered, he cut himself off, once and for all, from his former life. For a reason, unknown to the world, his brother Charles and his wife were included with the rest. Occasional paragraphs in the press referred to the idiosyncrasies of the twenty-third Lord D'Enville; hints were given as to obscure motives for such unheard-of behaviour under by no means exceptional circumstances.

More than one enterprising journalist, with an eye for effect, implied that Lady D'Enville was fully justified in leaving a man whose mental faculties were seriously impaired. But no response ever came from the wronged husband. Gradually the subject dropped, and it came to be generally accepted, with due lamentation at such unfeeling conduct, that Lord D'Enville desired to be left to himself.

Proper comment was paid to the fact that no women, beyond necessary servants, ever entered the doors of Stoke D'Enville, and it finally became the habit, when his birthday brought his name up for remark in columns headed by such phrases as "Personal Pars," to refer to him as "that somewhat eccentric nobleman with misogynistic tendencies." Meanwhile, after the required interval, Lady D'Enville returned as Mrs. Childe of Hatton, and in due course resumed her position as a leading hostess—the sole difference being that she entertained, and was entertained by, a slightly more broad-minded section of society.

Stoke D'Enville itself now comprised some four thousand acres of heavy Hertfordshire land. The present house was principally Elizabethan, built in

that E form which the courtiers of the day designed as a graceful compliment to their sovereign. Portions remained of the older castellated mansion, which had stood more than one siege in mediæval times, but the main building was Tudor, red-brick and remarkably beautiful. Inside was much fine oak panelling, quaint carvings and priceless tapestry. Nearly every room was full to overflowing with family portraits, even down to the bedrooms, relics of the union of many important families in this old race. A quiet, almost oppressive, sense of dignified repose pervaded the place, servants moved silently and solemnly through the lofty rooms, and in the nurseries alone were to be heard the sounds of life and merriment which can make a palace of a cottage.

In this atmosphere Harry D'Enville was accustomed to spend the major portion of his holidays. His uncle had formally expressed his readiness to allow him to come when he could—he had always liked the boy—and the D'Envilles were glad enough to fall in with the suggestion. His mother would have preferred to keep him with her if she could, but since they were compelled to let Mitchet Court—which Charles D'Enville had inherited from an uncle—and had no more permanent abode than the flat, she felt compelled, for Harry's own good, to let him go.

At the commencement of the Christmas holidays following the events last narrated, Harry journeyed down to his uncle's to spend some three weeks before going to Mulford Abbey with his people.

His life at Stoke D'Enville was uneventful, and he seldom saw a soul beyond the agent and one or two neighbours he visited by himself. On the rare

occasions when shooting parties were entertained not much variation was made from the usual procedure. Only the excellence of the sport induced men to come, for everything was conducted with the strictest ceremony. The first covert shoot was finished, and the second coincided with the Mul-fords', so there would be no one at all in the house save his uncle and the two small boys.

He enjoyed himself, however, on the whole. He rode round the estate with the owner most days—the latter's sole interest was farming, and he dressed habitually in clothes which were more adapted to comfort than display—and shot with the old keeper when he could get away in the afternoons. In the evenings he usually played with his cousins for an hour or so ; he then dined with his uncle alone, and, after a solemn game of chess, retired early to bed. Though Lord D'Enville allowed him to visit anyone he wished to, it was clearly a favour, and the only people Harry saw much of were the Larkings. Hubert Larking was at Eton with him, and his father owned a fine property adjoining. This was the fruit of hard work on behalf of Mr. Larking senior as a merchant in the City ; but the family happened to be an old one, and save for the glamour of the title and great connections, could fairly be ranked with the D'Envilles.

However, Mr. Larking had married to suit his profession rather than his descent, and the country—that is, those families which had been settled there a generation or two—affected to regard the owners of Arton Park as rather *nouveau riches*.

Hubert, the eldest boy, was an intimate friend of Harry's now, and exercised an influence for good on him. In himself, Harry was thoughtless, extravagant

and inclined to indulge every fancy of the moment. His parents grudged him nothing, his father to save himself the trouble of thinking, his mother from absolutely unregulated affection. Only Lord D'Enville ever gave him sound advice, and that studiously cynical and impersonal. Young Larking's conscientious steady nature, his keenness at whatever he undertook, and his determined independence, were the antithesis of Harry's careless, good-tempered readiness to make the best of everything without bothering about ethics.

It was undoubtedly fortunate for Harry that his best if not most intimate, friend, should be his nearest neighbour here, and that his uncle should have formed an estimate of the nephew which was at complete variance with his knowledge of that nephew's father.

The D'Envilles had always been noted for irresponsibility from the days of the Regency when the then holder of the title—who had been known to his friends as "D'Éville," a nickname most of his successors inherited—succeeded in gambling away the vast estates which had once appertained to the family all over England. The marvel was that he stopped at Stoke D'Enville itself, but that may have been through the mischance which overtook him after a gross surfeit at supper in the Pavilion at Brighton, which cut him off in the prime of a most promising career of profligacy.

Thanks to well-judged matches with the daughter of a worthy and opulent City alderman, and, in the case of the twenty-first lord, with the only child of a gentleman who had accommodated him with several loans at extortionate interest—much to the unavailing fury of the father-in-law when told of the

event, after it occurred—the family had contrived to maintain its position very adequately up to the close of the nineteenth century. Since his retirement from society, the present peer had pulled his affairs round again, and looked forward to leaving his son and successor in possession of a sufficient income.

Considering the contiguity of the estate to London, it reflected great credit on the family—or else represented a special dispensation of Providence, continued during many centuries – that Stoke D'Enville still remained to its original owners. In almost every similar case the attractions of London, the gambling, the costly entertainments, the expenses of town life, have resulted in the dissipation of the old acres by some one or other of the line. There must have been a streak of prudence or self-interest somewhere in the D'Enville blood, which held back the most reckless of them from the ultimate stake of their historic home.

If Harry had lived entirely with his parents, there can be no doubt that inherited tendencies to self-indulgence on both sides, combined with entire absence of restraint, would have turned the balance against any saving qualities in an affectionate, impulsive nature whose chief enemy was itself. But for the steadying influences at Stoke D'Enville, he would neither have worked nor played so well at Eton as he had—though, as it was, the latter occupied his time and thoughts to a very much greater degree than the former. He never lacked money; his mother's great joy was to see that he had all and more than he could spend, and Charles D'Enville compromised with the remains of his conscience by the simple process of persuading himself that no

father could do more for a son than provide him with as much ready money as he liked.

He ~~had~~ again the simple life at his uncle's, and the absence of all opportunity for spending, helped him; while Hubert Larking's example, though he scoffed sometimes at his careful consideration of how he laid out his allowance, was not without its effect on Harry.

The eventual development of his character depended a great deal on the next year of his life, for he was old for his age in many ways, owing to his bringing up. When with his parents he always had what he considered a splendid time. They took him to stay with the gayest and most delightful people possible. He knew his way about London almost as soon as he could walk, and he enjoyed this side of his existence to the full.

But he also enjoyed the quiet and, by comparison, dull weeks he spent in the home of his ancestors. He felt the contrast, and his temperament delighted in extremes. He was old enough to appreciate the fact that his people had lived here, on these lands, for eight hundred years, and to be impressed thereby. The rolling, wooded country, where so many generations of D'Envilles had walked and ridden and shot; the stately park, with its ancient oaks and elms and beeches, and the quiet grandeur of the house and its associations; the ancestors—plain or fair ladies, grim or debonair men—afforded him food for thought in the more serious moments when the weight of his full seventeen years oppressed him with the consciousness that he was a man.

One day in the last week of the year he was returning from an afternoon's shooting of outlying coverts with his uncle. Hubert Larking, for the

first time, had been permitted to join them for the actual shooting. Never before, since the break up of his home, had any human being except Harry received such informal treatment from Lord D'Enville.

"So that fellow is a friend of yours?" observed the latter.

They were walking briskly across the park in the fast-gathering twilight of the winter evening. Lord D'Enville was attired with his usual disregard of appearances. Tall, broad, and fully bearded, he looked more like a blacksmith than a noble of high descent. He carried his gun under his arm; a thick serge coat, stained and faded from much use, hung loosely from his shoulders. Baggy knickerbockers of similar war-worn appearance covered his lower limbs and hung below the knees over a pair of rough plain stockings. He wore no cap, and his grey hair, which he allowed to grow long and shaggy, almost hid his low flannel collar. The costume was finished off by a pair of heavy useful boots. A stranger might well have taken him for a well-to-do farmer of some fifty years of age, and few of his old friends would have recognised the smart, popular, well-groomed man about town who had once been known to all London, and who had not yet completed his fortieth year.

"Yes, Uncle Henry; he's a jolly good sort, a bit of a 'sap' perhaps, but he is practically a cert. for his eleven next summer."

"Indeed!" commented Lord D'Enville. "That should counterbalance any little weakness in the direction of application to such trifles as his books."

Harry laughed. "I dare say I am jealous be-

Society Mother

in 'first hundred,' and I am only just in the first Army Class."

"Let me see, you are leaving here next week, are you not?" His uncle always treated Harry as an equal, and never omitted the usual conventions in their intercourse.

"Yes, I am going with my people to Mulford," the boy said. He always referred to his father and mother in this way—as though talking to a stranger—to his uncle.

"It is unfortunate the date should clash with my second shoot here. You did not inform me till too late to make any alteration."

It had never struck Harry that Lord D'Enville would alter his plans for a reigning sovereign, much less for his nephew; besides, he always avoided mention of his parents where possible.

"I never thought——" he began.

"You are useful," said the other shortly.

"Oh," said Harry, feeling rather crushed.

After a few minutes' silence Lord D'Enville asked:

"By the way, has anything been settled as to your career?"

"I am going up for Sandhurst next half," Harry replied. "I ought to pass all right, as one only has to qualify for the Guards."

"Is it finally decided that you are to enter that select body of the representatives of England's plutocracy?" asked Lord D'Enville, sarcastically.

"I suppose so."

"Is it not a somewhat expensive avocation?"

"Oh, apparently my father is doing very well now in the City. He is working with a man called

Leonardson—a sort of English Rothschild, they say—and I believe we are going to make no end of cash out of it.”

“Indeed!” commented the other drily.

“Yes. He came down to Eton the other day with mother and Lady Mulford.”

“Did he? And since I presume this gentleman is not in private, a philanthropist as well as a financier, whatever he may be in public, in what manner is he to be repaid?”

Harry hesitated. He did not know what to say. It seemed like giving his parents away to tell his uncle the facts. The latter was different to other people, and would be sure to regard it from some point of view of his own. After all, though, it did not much matter what he said, as he never saw anyone, Harry told himself. He wanted the opinion of some man. Secretly he had worried a good deal over this arrangement of his parents. It seemed rather *infra dig.* for D’Envilles to go in for that sort of thing, considering who they were and what a bounder the other fellow was. He had purposely joked about it to his mother when she told him—he never took her seriously—but he had expended no small amount of cogitation on the matter since.

Harry’s voice indicated that he was on the defensive as he replied:

“There is some notion of his wanting to blossom out in society.”

Lord D’Enville’s next remark lacked the usual note of irony. He understood Harry’s feelings, if he did not share them.

“I must confess I do not see why people should not make these bargains—I conclude a bargain has

been made—just as much as in any other sphere. Each party can provide the other with a commodity they are in need of. It is their own business to see they respectively obtain good value, and so long as both sides are satisfied, it is no one else's concern. I don't suppose the world takes my view, unless it has altered a good deal lately," he added in his usual tone.

"I don't quite like it, Uncle Henry."

"My dear boy, for goodness' sake avoid hunting trouble. Wait till it comes. Very likely your father will become a millionaire, and Leonardson the lion of the season. From my own experience I should judge that the latter event is more probable than the former," he concluded cynically, muffling the last sentence in his beard.

"I beg your pardon?" Harry said.

"What does your mother think of it?" asked his uncle, ignoring the boy's words and speaking harshly.

"She seemed quite pleased." Harry always closed up when his mother was mentioned by anyone, and his uncle had scarcely ever spoken her name the last three years. The question surprised him.

For a moment Lord D'Enville strode along in silence, his face stern, and Harry wondered what thoughts caused the change in his expression. Then he spoke again.

"I have no quarrel with her, indeed, we were always good friends. She is your mother, and the only woman with whom I am in any way concerned. I should be—sorry—if misfortune overtook her. She has not had a great chance."

Harry was more surprised than ever. He could

think of nothing to say, and applied himself to keeping up with his uncle's huge strides.

"It is no business of mine what a woman does. If she gets into trouble you can come to me. I don't like this sort of thing. Don't tell her I said so. She has a good heart, and only wants ballast. Not a word now. We will drop the subject."

The sentences were jerked out like backfires from a petrol engine. Harry listened in amazement, not conceiving the effort it cost his uncle to say so much. After a pause he collected his senses, and replied :

"Thanks, Uncle Henry."

"If you care for my opinion, I should look out for some other profession for yourself. With your predispositions to justify the family nickname, the life is scarcely likely to conduce to your eventual good." The sarcasm was strongly in evidence again.

"But I know such heaps of other fellows——"

"Friends?" asked Lord D'Enville

"Oh, they are very good sorts, you know——"

"What is young Larking's future occupation?"

"His father gave him the choice of anything he liked, and he is not sure if he will go into their business or try for the diplomatic service. I expect he will do the first."

"Shows his sense," grunted the other. "And your cousin Kirby?"

"He's in the same box as I am."

"Which would you rather be with?"

"Old Larking's an awfully good sort," Harry responded a little doubtfully.

"But Kirby's more amusing?" Lord D'Enville laughed. "Upon my word, I don't know which is best. Hard work, respectability, and an easy

conscience—so we are led to believe—or a high old time and no conscience at all. Whichever you go in for, ~~ye~~ you will probably regret sooner or later.”

They reached the house, and the conversation naturally ceased. Never before had his uncle spoken on such personal topics, and Harry was more than a little bewildered.

CHAPTER VI

Harry had dined on Christmas day at Arton Park with the Larking family for the first time, and been considerably impressed. Usually he had been with his parents at some gay house-party, assembled for any other motive than the observance of the solemn festival which provided a convenient excuse. The last two anniversaries had passed at Stoke D'Enville, where practically no change was made from the usual routine; so it was an entirely new experience for him to be among a cheerful but domestic family for this occasion.

The practical, matter-of-fact side of life was something utterly outside his purview. Save on rare occasions, when his mother was seized with fits of conscience, he had seldom been inside a church. At Eton the compulsory chapel every day was regarded simply and solely as part of the curriculum. Such boys as possessed convictions on the subject of religion kept them "religiously" to themselves. It was always a source of wonder to Harry that Hubert Larking should take everything seriously, and, of course, he recognised that the whole family looked upon life with different eyes to his own parents. But the reasons for this he had never inquired into. He was aware that they did, and explained it on the assumption that they were old-fashioned and knew no better.

There was a large party in the house, consisting principally of nieces and nephews, and good-humour reigned supreme. Mr. Larking delighted in making others happy, while his wife, large and the essence of good-nature, beamed promiscuously on everybody and everything. Harry arrived from the grim atmosphere of Stoke D'Enville among a high-spirited noisy party. There was none of the quick wittiness of his parents' friends—only simple enjoyment of life. Even Hubert, staid and solemn as he usually was, seemed to be influenced by the general enthusiasm, and entered into every joke with the keenest zest. Eventually the spirit of good-will infected Harry, and he began to feel younger and less of a man than he had done for quite a number of years. A huge dinner was done full justice to. Turkeys, plum-puddings, mince-pies, crackers, nuts, and all the time-honoured accompaniments of the feast were fully in evidence.

Games followed, and snap-dragon. There were periods of blind-man's buff, hunt-the-slipper, and the like. Finally, about eleven o'clock, Harry reluctantly tore himself away. Mr. Larking pressed a couple of sovereigns into his hand, and Mrs. Larking presented him with the last thing in knives—the good lady's only conception of a suitable gift for youthful members of the male sex. It was impossible to refuse either of them, though Harry did not want the knife, and wondered whether it was quite the thing to accept tips still. The whole party came to the door to bid him good-night, and a sense of loneliness crept over him as he drove away in the black night, back to his uncle's cold and unsympathetic abode.

The Larkings might be "impossible," as his

mother had told him, but they made one jolly comfortable, and he did not see how they were any worse than Leonardson. They might not be so rich, but they were ripping good sorts.

The recollection of his evening stayed in Harry's mind for many a long day. The joyous, excited faces round the table, the fat, smiling countenance of his hostess—ever glancing with complacent pride at her eldest son—the portly, genial host at the other end, and the unstinted good cheer, the hearty, unmistakably genuine ring about the whole affair, He had never felt so welcome anywhere before, or so free of all restraint, and he appreciated the sensation, even as he told himself that it was rather second-class; then he put away this last suggestion with a sense of shame at permitting it to enter his mind.

But, had he known it, a canker was working, silently and remorselessly, at the root of the prosperity of the house of Larking. Even when he laughed as loudly, and applauded as heartily, as any among the merry company, Mr. Larking was conscious of the anxiety in his heart, and raised his voice the more powerfully, smiled the more kindly in consequence. Some opposing interest was competing with his own long-established business—an interest so powerful and so enterprising that he was compelled to acknowledge something more than concern as to the issue. Lately profits had begun to show the effect of the persistent attack on the particular field his firm worked in. There was no immediate danger of collapse, but undoubtedly appreciable progress had been made by this new competitor, and unless something was done to check them, still more serious inroads must be

expected on the profits. But no sign of this sunken peril showed on the surface at present. Only Mr. Larking lay awake sometimes at night, his mind occupied with gloomy forebodings.

The afternoon before Harry was due at Mulford he and Hubert were seated in the smoking-room at Arton, after shooting all day. They would not meet again till they returned to Eton for the Easter half, and they were discussing their prospects.

"I shall leave for certain after the summer," said Hubert. "The gov'nor wants me to start work at once, now I have settled to go into the business." This was the first echo of Mr. Larking's secret fears; he had expressed an opinion in favour of his son giving up all idea of diplomacy for commerce, and Hubert had immediately agreed to this suggestion.

"I shall go up for Sandhurst," announced Harry, "and if I pass we shall leave Eton at the same time. You are certain of your eleven, that's one thing."

"I intend to have a good shot," replied the other, "Father is getting down one of the Surrey bowlers to coach me in the Easter holidays, and you had better come along too. I suppose you'll be at your uncle's?"

"I will take good care of that," Harry replied. "Thanks most awfully, old chap, it would be grand."

"If you buck up, you will get in all right," said Hubert, referring to Harry's own prospects of playing for the school. "It would be splendid if we both did."

"Wouldn't it," agreed Harry.

"Oh, by the way," he went on, "the gov'nor says he met your father over some business or other in the City a few days ago."

"Oh?" said Harry.

"Yes. He never comes down here, does he?"

"No; my uncle and he don't hit it off. I only wish they did," he continued rather sadly, "it's dull enough over there as it is." He indicated the direction of Stoke D'Enville. "Ever since my aunt went away there hasn't been a soul near the place, except the shooting parties; and we know what they are."

"It's a topping old place," Hubert remarked enthusiastically.

"Yes, isn't it? I love it. I asked my father the other day if he couldn't come down, and he said he had no great personal objection now, was willing to let bygones be bygones, but as soon as I breathed a word to Uncle Henry he shut me up like a ton of bricks."

"It's an awful pity. Everyone says so. Your uncle ought to come out and marry again. He was awfully decent the other day when I was shooting there."

"Yes, he's all right. Lately he seems to be more interested in things too," said Harry, thinking of the talk about his mother and his affairs. "He's a beastly cynic, though—slangs everything. Father is bad enough, but he is amusing. Uncle Henry only seems bitter."

"My mother was saying the other day she would like to have a good talk to him. She loves arranging other people's affairs, as you know."

"He won't speak to any woman of his own class," said Harry, "and he only sees the nurses because he can't help it. Directly my cousins are old enough he is going to have tutors and valets for them."

"I'm not sure I don't agree with him," replied

Hubert, with the air of an octogenarian. "Mother is all very well, but the sex as a whole don't appeal to me."

"You cold-blooded specimen," Harry laughed; "wait till you begin to go about a bit;" he spoke as if he thoroughly understood his subject. "I will introduce you to some topping girls next summer."

"You gay Lothario," chaffed Hubert.

"Scoffers are always the first to fall when it comes to the point," Harry retorted. "You will be no end of a dog when you once lose your coyness."

Hubert hurled a cushion at his companion's head.

"I prefer you uncle's views," he said; "but bar rot, I wanted to ask you if you had heard anything from your father of a millionaire fellow called Leonardson?"

"Rather, I know him. Why?"

"The gov'nor was talking about him the other day, and saying he doesn't like his methods, nor him."

"I agree," interjected Harry, "in reference to the last item."

"He said your father was very thick with him."

"You are right, my son, he is; but you can trust Charles D'Enville to look after number one."

"And he also said very few people ever got the better of him," continued Hubert.

"So I should imagine," agreed Harry, smiling.

"The gov'nor seemed rather anxious about it, that's why I am telling you."

"Well, my respected parent doesn't come to me for advice—extraordinary how short-sighted some

people are—and I guess he has got something to sell that Leonardson wants to buy.”

“That’s all right, then,” said Hubert.

Harry got up to depart, and the two boys said good-bye till they were to meet at Eton in a week’s time.

CHAPTER VII

Harry joined his mother in town and travelled down to Mulford with her. The rest of the party were not due to arrive till the next day, and Leonardson would bring Charles D'Enville in his motor. He had wanted to escort Mrs. D'Enville, but she was anxious for the extra day with Harry, and refused his request. Besides, she never cared to make herself cheap, and had been seeing enough of the financier to be aware she need not. Their affairs seemed satisfactory enough to her just now. There was nothing very much to worry about for the moment. Charles was full of the most sanguine anticipations—he considered the mine was bound to set them permanently on their legs ; Leonardson was most friendly disposed, and would aid him in other projects ; Harry's future was assured, and there was no reason why they should not be able, should they so desire, to live at Mitchet themselves. With the boy growing up, and their improved financial prospects, it would be more compatible with their position to occupy the place, even though it were only for a few weeks in the year—such were Mr. D'Enville's views as expressed to his wife.

"I suppose your uncle was just the same this time ? " Mrs. D'Enville asked.

"He's getting a regular society leader—on the

contrary," replied Harry; "he had Hubert up to shoot one whole afternoon."

Mrs. D'Enville sighed. "I wish Charles could make it up with him."

"What was the row?" asked Harry; he had never been told any particulars, nor liked to inquire. His mother seemed to be equally in the dark.

"I never knew the precise details, or you might have known now. You are old enough. It was at the time of the divorce, and your uncle may have thought your father took a wrong view."

"I know father says he was sorry for Aunt Dot," Harry said, "and wondered she could have stood it as long as she did—but," he went on shrewdly, "I thought that was rather more effect than cause." He laughed at his own deductions in a boyish way, but his mother did not join in.

"I wonder," she said pensively. "You have glimpses of intelligence at times, Harry, and I have sometimes thought the same myself."

Harry then asked: "You and Uncle Henry always got on, didn't you?"

"Oh, well enough," she replied; "he was so absorbed in his 'Dot' that he had little thought to spare for anyone else. Even if he was rather on the heavy side, we were always good friends."

"I believe he likes you still, mother—only he's a professional woman-hater now and must act up to it."

She laughed and kissed him fondly. "You queer infant! It will take more than you to persuade D'Enville to speak to a woman again, if he can help it. I'm not sure I blame him either," she added.

Harry said no more. His uncle had told him not

to repeat the few words he had said respecting a possible reconciliation.

At Mulford station Lord Kirby met them with a car. The luggage would follow, so they were soon on the road. It appeared that only the immediate family were at the Abbey—that is, Lord and Lady Mulford, the eldest daughter Frances, and her husband Sir Robert Baldwin, and Kirby himself. The younger unmarried daughter, Florence, was away, and not returning for a few days. The following day another man—besides Charles D'Enville and Leonardson—and Baroness Metsor, wife of the Styrian ambassador, and a shining light in the firmament of London, were expected. The remaining guests would be neighbours. The Baroness was a great notoriety seeker; she entertained magnificently from a famous house no one else could afford to inhabit, and was always on the lookout for new stars as attractions for her parties, and to draw the eye of the world to her doings.

Mrs. D'Enville was both interested and excited when she heard this lady would be in the house. Unless she was much mistaken, Leonardson was the very man she would make a dead-set at, and the extent of her own influence over him would be made clear.

Before going to bed that night Lady Mulford had a chat with her.

"Your 'tiger' is coming out with a flourish of trumpets," she began. "I hear he intends to do things in a big way. The papers are beginning to 'discover' him now."

"Yes, he means to go the whole hog," said Mrs. D'Enville, brushing her hair energetically.

The two women were sitting in comfortable negligée

by the fire, and under these circumstances confidences are supposed to fly.

"I hope he is doing his duty by Charles all right."

"My partner in sorrow—or matrimony—is remarkably pleased with himself up to the present."

"By the way, Maie, the Baroness mentioned in her letter—I told her who the party were—that she had heard you had some nabob or other in tow." Lady Mulford made little digs at the coals with the poker as she spoke. "It is extraordinary how quickly things get about. I replied that he was a City friend of Charles's, but you may be glad to know."

"Good heavens! Connie, if we minded what people say we should have to emigrate. I bet you my bridge debts our friend makes more than half an attempt to attach him to her own select strain."

"I see the light of battle in your eye, Maie. Take care. If you design to prevent her, she will have more than a little to say on the subject afterwards."

The other laughed with a hard note which grated on her companion's ear.

"He will please himself, I expect. And I really shall not lie awake at night for fear of what the dear Baroness may say."

Lady Mulford looked troubled. She knew how great a failure the D'Enville *ménage* had always been, and she had worried over Maie's recklessness of consequences on more than one occasion. She did not believe her worse than thoughtless, but thoughtlessness is apt to lead to disaster only too easily; while few women could go on indefinitely without sympathy or affection from some source. Maie was certainly not of the self-reliant order of her sex. After all these years it would be a thousand

pities if she came to serious grief—and Lady Mulford was nervous.

"It isn't that. Of course we know the value of gossip," she said; "we exist on scandal, more or less—the season would come to an untimely end if people could not pick each other's reputations to shreds to pass the time—but," her eyes were kind as she turned them on her guest, "Mr. Leonardson struck me as a man who would not stop at trifles, and he was decidedly——"

Mrs. D'Enville broke in: "If I cannot look after myself at the mature age of thirty-seven I deserve all I get." She spoke lightly, but it was evident she was moved.

"It is no affair of mine, dear, but you won't think me an interfering busybody——" Lady Mulford smiled deprecatingly.

"It is too rare an experience for anyone to evince interest in my concerns for me to resent it," said Mrs. D'Enville bitterly.

"Oh, rubbish, my dear; you are morbid. Without being accused of gush, I may say I am your friend."

Her companion stared moodily in the fire without replying to this speech for a moment. Then she sighed wearily.

"I am heartily sick of the whole thing. If Charles pulls off a really big *coup* with this gold mine I shall retire to Mitchet and revert to the vegetable type—president of the mothers' union, annual garden-party, vicar to lunch on Sundays, and so on. With that Arcadian vision before me I must see if I cannot perform my share towards its attainment."

"Including the 'stroking' of our 'riend the 'tiger'?" asked Lady Mulford.

"He supplies the petrol for the car," responded

the other thoughtfully. "It requires a goodly supply too, one way and another, and we must not run short on the road. Tigers are only large cats, they must be kept purring."

"At all costs?"

"Oh, one has to judge how much they are worth, I suppose."

Lady Mulford rose to withdraw. "Well, good-night, Maie. I sincerely trust you will succeed in keeping the teeth and claws covered up. That is what has been troubling me, for I have an instinctive dread of this particular specimen."

"Good-night, Connie. Thank you so much! A lonely woman wants all the friends she has—at times."

"If you are inclined to—to pay too high a price for petrol, think of the boy." She went out, closing the door softly.

"Ah, Harry," breathed his mother. "Yes, thank God, there is you."

CHAPTER VIII

The Mulford coverts were exceptionally good. The country lent itself admirably to the securing of high birds, and the area of wood was sufficient to hold an almost unlimited number. Lord Mulford would have liked to provide quantity in the same proportion as quality for his guests, but the limitations of his purse vetoed the accomplishment of his desires in this respect. Accordingly, he professed to consider the elevation at which his pheasants passed over the guns as the sole desideratum of the sport. Big bags were within reach of any man prepared to spend the money, in his forcible opinion, whereas "management" was required to show the beggars to real advantage.

Under the particular circumstances at Mulford it happened that, from the situation of the coverts and the lie of the land, very little trouble was required to persuade pheasants to fly high, while considerable care would have been demanded to control a really large head on the thickly wooded estate.

Whoever designed the plantations, whether nature or man, might have conceived them with an eye to covert shooting alone. Woods covered nearly every piece of high ground, and the undulations of the land enabled the shooters to stand as far below

the natural flight of the birds as the most skilful exponent of the art of gunnery could wish.

Fox, the enormously stout but capable head-keeper, whose name provided material for many a witticism, knew his business adequately. He was a year or two behind the times in some of his methods, but had a sound knowledge of the needs of young pheasants, and a sufficient appreciation of the desirability of making them fly well when the time came.

This year, for one reason and another, the difficulty of getting the right guns, or avoiding a clash with other people's shoots, the coverts had not yet been touched. The food bill was mounting seriously, there should be no trouble on the score of low shots, and, with every bird in the prime of its strength, Lord Mulford was anxious to get to work.

The party turned out after breakfast. Lord Mulford and Kirby, Charles D'Enville and Harry, Sir Robert Baldwin, Leonardson and Frank Tempest were staying in the house, while three neighbours completed the list.

Harry was extremely anxious to see Leonardson shoot. He could not shake off the dislike he had taken to him at first sight, and this had not been lessened by the fact that the financier had conspicuously attached himself to Mrs. D'Enville the night before. Harry had noticed this with resentment. He was sensitive where his mother was concerned, and knew enough of the world to take in what was going on to some extent. Leonardson had created a favourable impression generally. The D'Envilles vouched for his wealth, and his self-possessed, confident, yet quiet manner passed well enough where no one expects more than superficial politeness.

Wealth does not require the polish of breeding—or perhaps it serves to hide the cheapness of the material it gilds.

The Baroness was immediately interested in him—she told him he reminded her of the old Spanish nobility—and determined that he should augment her list of “draws” at the first possible moment. He had played bridge with a masterly skill and readiness which was thoroughly appreciated by his partners. He had amused Lady Mulford at dinner with stories of high finance, and had afterwards, with smooth determination, devoted himself to Mrs. D’Enville in that unmistakable manner which Harry objected to. Indoors he was undoubtedly a success. His force and magnetism were felt by everyone, and Harry alone resisted any inclination to yield to his power of fascination.

The boy observed with scornful pleasure that his shooting garb was unimpeachably correct, from the long spats to the patently new hat. His guns were not scratched, while his valet, who loaded for him, was as immaculate as his master. The well-worn clothes of most of the others made a noticeable contrast, and Harry intimated to Kirby that their friend’s garments would probably suffer more damage than he would do to the game.

“Put me in the second row behind him at Barley End,” implored Harry. “He is certain not to touch them there, and I should love to wipe his beastly eye.”

“Right you are,” agreed the other. “I will manage that.”

During the morning, however, Leonardson performed with credit, if not with distinction. He shot in good style, if on the slow side, and accounted for

his fair share of the bag up to lunch. The birds flew well, and there was enough wind—from the right quarter—to render them quite difficult enough. Of the other guns, Charles D'Enville invariably shot with finished skill, serenely and gracefully, as he made his way through life. It appeared to be no effort. He put up his gun, and the right bird fell at the right moment, struck well forward in the head or breast. Harry always watched his father's performance with pride, and strove to emulate both his ease and precision, with some success. Lord Mulford fussed somewhat both over the details of administration and the actual shooting. He killed a goodly proportion of his shots, but the effort was obvious, and usually he "tailored" too many. Baldwin made good, steady practice. He was an imperturbable young man, the son of an enormously rich cotton-spinner, who had purchased a baronetcy some years before in the usual way, and had cemented his elevation by marrying his son to a member of an older section of the aristocracy. Tempest had been invited as one of the best-known shots of the day. Pheasants were his speciality, and it was a treat to see him shoot. He came because he knew he would get good birds - even if not in vast numbers.

The three neighbours all did their duty. One, the local M.P., with a good deal of flourish; the other two with typical impassivity.

Harry and Kirby, though they took part in the proceedings, were kept on the flanks, and had to content themselves with taking stock of the others. They could both shoot well, and were capable of doing their share—also of calculating the form of their companions.

Leonardson's shooting puzzled Harry. He kept a close eye on his *bête noire*—as he began to consider him—and could not quite place him in his category of good, bad, and indifferent. He killed his birds clean, as a rule, and he picked the right ones, though, since there were no very big rises in the morning, and those that came were usually in ones or twos, there was not much opportunity for exercising judgment. There was something unusual about his methods which Harry could not quite fathom.

Lunch was partaken of in the keeper's house, and the ladies were waiting when the shooters arrived. Leonardson contrived to secure a chair next to Mrs. D'Enville, and Harry, who wanted to do the same, was compelled to content himself with a place opposite, greatly to his dissatisfaction.

"Did anybody see a fox?" demanded Lord Mulford. It was his invariable joke on these occasions, and he looked at Leonardson.

"Oh, spare us," broke in his wife. "We know that so very well now, and it was not brilliant five years ago."

Leonardson looked puzzled.

"I didn't notice one," he said.

"What!" shouted Mulford in great delight. "Not see our fox? The biggest in all Buckinghamshire."

"He is referring to the keeper," explained Lady Mulford. "I dare say you didn't know his name is Fox."

Having thoroughly enjoyed his jest—Leonardson joined in the laugh against himself—and on the best of terms with everyone, the genial host proceeded to apply himself to the business of the moment.

"We are all coming to watch your achievements

at Barley End after lunch," remarked Lady Frances Baldwin, who always had plenty to say for herself. "I am going to look after Bob, and see he doesn't go to sleep."

"Not much fear of that with you in the neighbourhood, my dear," returned her husband good-humouredly, helping himself to some more Irish stew.

Baroness Metsor turned to Leonardson.

"And may I cheer *you* on to glory?" she asked archly.

"Mrs. D'Enville is going to honour me," he replied—"at least I hope I may claim the fulfilment of your promise?" he continued to his neighbour.

Harry eyed his mother anxiously. She had said she would stand by him if she could, and he wanted her to see him wipe Leonardson's eye, as he hoped to do.

Mrs. D'Enville laughed lightly, without looking at her son. "Of course, I shall be delighted," she said.

Lord Mulford caught what was going on, and immediately broke in:

"You are not deserting me, Baroness, I trust? I have been looking forward to the prospect of your company all the morning."

So the incident passed, and Maie D'Enville felt she had won the first skirmish. Yet she was conscious of the same dread of something sinister which always seemed to emanate from Leonardson. She told herself that once they were safe beyond the rocks she would be glad to be quit of him.

The Barley End rise was famous all over the county. The morning operations were conceived with the object of driving the birds towards this

point. Then, half an hour or more in carefully driving foot, under the orders of the great Fox—Lord Mulford, never allowed the occasion to pass without a loudly spoken warning, which invariably evoked delighted grins from the beaters, against permitting a "fox" to get among the massed birds—into the Barley End copse. This movement successfully carried out, boys were placed round the edges as stops, and the remainder of the party, guns and assistants and all, adjourned for lunch. Under favourable conditions some four or five hundred pheasants should be crouching in the thick undergrowth, doubtless wondering no little as to the cause of these proceedings.

In due time the guns took up their places. They stood in two rows, in the front those guests whom Lord Mulford wished to obtain the best of the shooting, as regards numbers. These comprised Leonardson, Baldwin, and the three neighbours. Behind them, at the point where the birds would reach the zenith of their flight, were posted the remainder, from whom would be required no small degree of skill to accomplish even a quite moderate percentage of kills to misses.

The copse was on the summit of a rise, and the birds were driven out, back in the direction they had come from and towards their home woods, over the guns stationed in the hollow below; so that by the time a pheasant, rising from the ground and mounting as rapidly as he could on catching sight of the men, reached the second row, he was only just in shot.

On this occasion there was a slight breeze across the line of flight which caused the birds to curve

round on a slant, which, though it did not greatly affect them for the first part of their course, rendered them about as difficult as might be for the back division.

Only Tempest and Charles D'Enville succeeded in doing real execution here—they, as the two best guns, being in the back row, as the post of honour. Harry and Kirby knocked down a few, while Lord Mulford was unable to touch anything, and consequently was highly indignant with the whole affair. As this happened every year no one took much notice.

It was a pretty sight in the feeble light of the afternoon sun. Inside the copse a few chosen men moved discreetly in advance of the rest, flushing the birds in lots of three or four, and avoiding anything like a burst. In this way nearly every pheasant afforded a shot as they passed, almost singly, over the heads of the guns. Now and again it necessarily happened that several broke out together, and then the crack men behind had their real chances. For the first few minutes the front line let scarcely any go by, and Harry fumed as he saw Leonardson coolly taking his birds in excellent form.

As the copse emptied, the line of beaters advanced, and finally Fox brought the beat to a close with a big flush. Some fifty or sixty pheasants rose together, scattering as they cleared the branches, but all heading well over the guns. The cocks showed conspicuously with their bronze shining in the sun, and their longer tails marking them out from the hens. Ground game broke nervously and hurriedly from the near side, and a jay or two, which had remained in hiding, trusting to avoid the necessity of coming into the open, fled screeching and dipping to the big wood.

Mrs. D'Enville was delighted. She clapped her hands joyously and laughed.

"How lovely!" she cried to Leonardson; "there, take that fellow."

He took him, and, on his mettle before her, proceeded to take most of the chances which came his way. Harry, behind, chafed at his disappointment. He had hoped Leonardson would not show up so well here, but he had done his fair share; while Harry himself, with Leonardson's birds falling sometimes almost at his feet as they slanted down the slope, was making distinctly bad practice at the high curving shots the birds presented when they reached him. His plot to wipe this calm gentleman's eye was returning home to roost, as it were (at any rate, the pheasants were, instead of his hitting them), and the more angry he became, the more he missed. His father was on one side of him and Tempest on the other. They both, especially the latter, continued to do good work, and Harry was conscious that they were aware of his failure. He fancied he detected a supercilious smile on Tempest's lips, and forthwith failed to touch another feather save the entire tail of a low-flying and quite simple old cock, which appendage descended round his diminished head, while the rightful possessor disappeared clucking into the wood at the back.

When the beat was over, Leonardson and Mrs. D'Enville moved back to see the former's birds picked up. Charles D'Enville joined them, while Harry stood rather sulkily watching.

"Didn't know you were such a good hand at it, Léonardson," said Mr. D'Enville cordially. "You brought down some of those fellows in first-rate

style. "Poor old Harry ~~new~~ had a look in, eh?" He turned to his son.

Harry was inwardly raging. Not only had Leonardson deprived him of his mother's company, but he had evidently proved entertaining from the way she had been laughing. Then, where he had schemed to score, he had been scored off with complete unconsciousness on the intended victim's part.

"Oh, it's easy enough in the front row," he muttered ungraciously.

His father had moved off to see his birds were gathered, and Leonardson laughed.

"Yes, I don't suppose I should have done much good behind," he said. "You see, my skill has been principally acquired at a shooting-school near London. I have never had much opportunity of going in for the real thing."

"Indeed," said Mrs. D'Enville, "you are very clever. I should never have supposed so."

"I should," remarked Harry, his feelings getting the better of his manners. It was unbearable, the fellow being buttered up like this, and the school explained his rather unusual manner of shooting. He turned and stalked off to look for one of his own wounded birds.

"I fear I have offended your son in some way," observed Leonardson, watching the boy with a sarcastic glint in his eye.

"I can't think what is the matter with him," said his mother deprecatingly. "I am so sorry. I have never known him like this before."

"He is jealous of you," he murmured, looking at her meaningly. "I can understand it. I should be the same in his case."

"Oh, nonsense," she said, "he would not be so absurd."

"I trust it is not absurd of him."

"Dear boy, he will be miserable afterwards,"—she evaded his remark. "I hope you will soon be great friends."

"I would do a great deal for anyone you are fond of ;" he spoke feelingly, his dark eyes meeting hers with a look she half dreaded, half enjoyed. It was a look to which she was growing accustomed.

"You have been a very good friend to us, and our bargain was a fine stroke of business. I only hope you are equally satisfied."

"I mean to be before we have done ;" his voice sounded hard.

"I am sorry we are failures so far."

"Only so far as I fail to advance in your esteem."

"My dear man, you are either obscure or melodramatic. If you were to say those sort of things to a girl nowadays she would think you were in love with her. Particularly with *your* income."

They were close to Lady Mulford and the Baroness, so he had no time to reply, but she was aware that he was looking at her queerly. Some power always impelled her to see how far she could go with him, from sheer love of the game.

"Ah, Mr. Leonardson, although I was not with you, I observed that you covered yourself with distinction," called the Baroness cheerily. "Lord Mulford was saying all the time what a splendid shot you were, yes."

She took possession of him for the next beat, and Mrs. D'Enville joined her son, who was walking moodily along by himself, with his gun over his shoulder. She took his free arm.

"Harry, old boy, what's the matter?"

"I don't like him, mother, although he was decent enough about his shooting. Why is he always hanging round you?"

She pressed his arm. "You goose; you forget he is to make our fortunes. You must beg his pardon, I am afraid."

He kicked a stone viciously aside. "Oh, I'll do that! Are you coming with me now?"

"Business before pleasure," she quoted lightly.

"What does that mean?" He was smiling now.

"I must deprive myself of the happiness of your society, my unmannerly son."

"Hang the business!"

"By all means, when it's completed."

They had reached the next beat, and, Lord Mulford taking off the Baroness, Leonardson dropped back and joined Mrs. D'Enville. Harry stepped to meet him.

"Sorry I was so beastly rude," he said. "You deprived me of my small mother's society," he added with a frank smile that lit up his face in strong contrast to the sulky expression which had disfigured it a brief while before.

"I can fully enter into your feelings--which must be my excuse," answered Leonardson, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder.

The action roused the old feeling of antagonism; but Harry did not draw back. He looked at his mother and laughed.

"You are in great request, it seems, young lady."

"I will see you later, my ancient relic," she retorted. "Go and get into your place."

Not very much more was done. The afternoon closed in quickly, and a short beat after this one

brought things to a finish. Lord Mulford, standing back in the wood, secured the only woodcock of the day--which feat so elated him that all recollection of his ill-success at Barley End was wiped away. Four hundred and fifty pheasants were laid out in the fading light. A few partridges and hares, and a number of rabbits made up the total to five hundred and forty-nine. This gave the host his opportunity.

"Since we've only got a live 'fox,'" he said in a loud voice, "with the expected response from the assembled throng, "I must make up the total myself with a woodcock."

With a majestic flourish he produced the bird in question, and received his congratulations with becoming modesty.

CHAPTER IX

At dinner that night Baroness Metsor satisfied herself by some very direct questions, which he was by no means loath to answer, that Leonardson was actually as rich as she had gathered. He told her he intended to move into his new house after Easter, that he had purchased the four priceless Titians which had been on the market so long without anyone being prepared to go to the figure demanded, that he was already owner of the palatial yacht available through the bankruptcy and suicide of the great New York banker, Mosenstral, and he hinted that he was in negotiation for the princely seat of one of Scotland's dukes.

"But, my dear good man," exclaimed the bewildered Baroness, shrugging her shoulders hopelessly, "where *have* you been all these years that no one has ever even seen you?"

"I believe in doing one thing at a time," he replied, "and doing it thoroughly. Half-measures are always failures, and this is an age where specialising and concentration are the secrets of success."

"And you intend to apply these terrible principles to society? You will be like a bull in a china-shop—is it not?—unless you step—ah!—so gingerly among the dainty pieces."

"That is where I shall hope for my friends' assistance," he observed pointedly.

The Baroness was delighted. She found Leonardson entirely satisfactory. He was her own age—she was an exceptionally well-preserved lady for forty-five, and handsome in a large, overpowering way—his peculiar style of good looks pleased her, and she flattered herself that she would have him firmly attached to her chain before the season began. A man of fabulous wealth, of personable appearance, and young—why, all London would fly to meet him. The men would be jealous and call him an "outsider," and the women would fall over one another to secure him for themselves or their daughters.

"I am happy indeed to have met you now," she returned, "and if I may number myself among your friends, it is possible I may be enabled to prove useful to you?"

"You are more than kind, Baroness," he said. This was what he required from her, and she was evidently as anxious to oblige him as he could possibly desire.

"But where have you lived all these years, Mr. Leonardson?" the lady repeated. "I cannot understand it. Why have none of our City friends persuaded you to come and see us before this?"

"It was difficult enough to confine one's self to work with no personal knowledge of what one was missing," he answered; "it would have been impossible had I allowed myself to even taste the attractions for myself."

"Ah, you will turn all our heads if you flatter us like that," she said gaily. He was as delightful as he was rich. What a find!

"I have had no time to study pretty speeches." He looked at her boldly.

She patted his sleeve with her fan. "I believe you will turn out some fairy prince in disguise," she announced, "or a sleeping beauty of the opposite sex to the one in the story. We must find a princess to wake you."

"She will be too late," he said, with another glance.

Mrs. D'Enville was seated at the other side of the table, and quite aware of the amusement the Baroness was deriving from Leonardson's company. She felt in a strange mood, as though nothing mattered to-night. Charles D'Enville had told her before dinner that the gold mine was to start crushing operations in two months' time. His holding was secured, and it was only a matter of a year before a fine return should be coming in. Meanwhile, Leonardson seemed as well disposed as ever and there were two or three other projects on the tapis which were almost equally important. He impressed upon her the necessity of using her best efforts to maintain their influence over him, particularly as he had let fall a delicate but clear intimation that the continuance of his good offices in the City would be dependent on his obtaining the return he desired.

Charles D'Enville had secured his election to one of the select social clubs which are glad to receive any presentable person with real wealth behind him, and done his best to arrange for his ultimate reception into one or two nominally even more particular bodies. Lord Mulford and one of the most scrupulous of the titled money-makers, who knew Leonardson in the City, had supported his

efforts, so that, on his side, Charles D'Enville considered he had provided good value so far.

After dinner, when the men followed the ladies into the saloon, Leonardson made a bee-line for Mrs. D'Enville, ignoring the Baroness's eye. He need not worry about the latter lady. Her measure had not required a great amount of research, and she would be ready for him when he was ready for her.

"At last," he muttered as he sat down. "I have been bored to death."

"You did not look it."

"I have learnt to hide my real feelings in an even better school than this, I fancy."

"The Baroness would be pleased to hear that."

"Did you mind?" he queried, with a half-smile twisting his mouth.

"I? Why on earth should I?"

Mrs. D'Enville bent down to pick up her handkerchief, but he forestalled her, so that their hands met. Contact with his flesh always caused a queer kind of thrill to pass through her, like a faint shock of electricity.

"I trust you will learn to," he murmured earnestly.

"Strict business hardly requires that," she rejoined.

He smiled. "*Tout vient à qui sait attendre.* I learnt it the other day—my French was neglected at the expense of addition in my younger days"—he thought of the accounts he used to add up in the little pawnbroker's shop—"and I believe I know how to wait. Of course," he went on, "since you introduced the subject of business, the Baroness is a good stroke. I think we may say a thousand."

"But that is hardly my doing," she objected.

This easy method of earning fat commissions was insidious. Her mind was not quite easy on the subject. Still, Charles would know all about it, and if Leonardson was satisfied . . .

"Oh yes. The introductions need not be direct so long as they are real value."

"Thanks," she said casually, "it will be handy. I must say you are a very agreeable person to work with."

"The sentiment is reciprocated. I will give you a cheque to-morrow."

She smiled at him. Such trifles as thousand-pound cheques were worth something.

The Baroness watched them for a few minutes, and then went up to her hostess.

"Aren't we going to play bridge?" she inquired. "I hear Mr. Leonardson is wonderful, and I was not at his table last night. By the way, he seems very much smitten. Maie evidently knows which side her bread is buttered."

The other laughed lightly. "He and Charles D'Enville are partners or something in the City." She raised her voice. "Who is for bridge? Come along, Mr. Leonardson, you must play."

The party divided and made up three tables; Harry, Kirby, and the latter's sister, Florence, who had returned that evening, being left out.

So Harry went and seated himself by his mother, who was partnered by Sir Robert Baldwin against Leonardson and the Baroness. The boy was endeavouring to persuade himself that this dark, evil-looking man was merely being made use of, and he intended to treat him the same as other people. It was nothing new to see his mother run after, but he

could not reconcile her apparent partiality for Leonardson with that gentleman's obvious lack of breeding. He was pleased and flattered when distinguished men or smart soldiers danced attendance upon her. It was only to be expected, he told himself, and although he was accustomed to hear women he knew lightly spoken of often enough, he, of course, never dreamed that his mother could be included among them when he was not there. His trouble was the fellow being a cad. Without troubling to define precisely the shades of character which mark out the class, he had not the least doubt on the subject. It stuck in his gullet.

He could play bridge, though. There was no question of that. Harry, having learnt young, knew the game and appreciated skill. The fellow never hesitated an instant, and yet he obviously had every card in his mind. Mrs. D'Enville and the Baroness, particularly the latter, played well from constant, assiduous experience, day after day, year after year - and Baldwin displayed the same soundness which characterised his shooting.

The cards were evenly divided, but the Baroness' triumphant expression told its tale. She was winning, and therefore enjoying herself thoroughly, and more than ever delighted with her partner. The man was a treasure, she told herself, as she beamed genially upon him. The judgment with which he declared and the subsequent certainty of his game were admirable. He seemed to see through the backs of the cards, or, at any rate, to be aware by some mysterious means of what everybody held halfway through a hand.

Finally they came out substantial winners. There was no cutting in. The three tables kept as they

were, and for each rubber the Baroness and Leonardson happened to be partners.

She was effusive in her appreciation, and Leonardson murmured to Mrs. D'Enville as the ladies were about to retire :

"It is worth fifteen hundred, *partner*."

"But the Baroness is your partner now," she said.

"Our partnership will be a longer one than that."

"We shall see."

"You will see," he declared. "I know." Once more Maie D'Enville almost shivered at the intensity of his tone.

"You can stand in the third row behind me on the bridge, Mr. Leonardson," broke in Harry, who came up to bid his mother good-night. "I forgot shooting isn't the only thing in the world."

"That's all right," responded the other, cordially. "I hope we shall have many opportunities of mutually improving our respective talents."

Mrs. D'Enville kissed her son fondly, looking round at Leonardson. "He isn't a bad boy, really," she said.

"And, as mothers go, you are a passable specimen," he chaffed.

Lord Mulford drew Leonardson apart in the smoking-room, having started the rest talking over the day's events.

"I want very much to have a word or two with you," he began, a little pompously. "I hope you won't mind my doing so, but I should be extremely obliged if I may ask your opinion on one or two little matters. It's out of school hours, I know, but it is difficult to get time for serious conversation on these occasions, eh?"

"Quite so," Leonardson replied gravely. "I am entirely at your service."

His host, having poured out a couple of whiskeys and sodas, after carefully ascertaining Leonardson's particular mixture, settled himself in a comfortable leather chair and indicated another.

"D'Enville was telling me, what I had no idea of," he commenced, "that you are, among your many other interests, more or less concerned with coal."

"We control the larger portion of the world's supply," the other replied calmly. He was congratulating himself. Charles D'Enville had earned his money so far. He had been a wise investment—apart from his wife—and would, in due time, be pensioned off when his work was finished.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the amazed nobleman. "I had no idea——"

"You would not," Leonardson interrupted in the same tone as before.

"Ah, quite so, quite so. But what I wished to—er—mention to you is that—er—I am told one of my properties contains very valuable deposits of—er—coal."

"The Blotching estate, you mean, in Warwickshire."

"Er—er, really I was not——"

"It is my business to know most things where my business is concerned," pronounced the financier, as he swallowed a mouthful of his drink.

"Still, I was only made aware of the fact myself a few weeks ago. It surprises me, I must confess——"

"It need not. Unless my memory plays me false, the information was conveyed to your agent by my partner's instructions." As Leonardson had all the

particulars ready before he came to Mulford, his memory was not greatly strained. He knew the value of effect.

"It is most remarkable, nevertheless. I am quite overcome."

Lord Mulford leaned back and took a good pull at his whiskey and soda. He was thankful he had never gone in for companies himself, if this was the sort of man one came across.

"Your desire is to secure working capital, I take it, or else to lease the rights with a royalty reserved?" inquired Leonardson after a short pause.

"Er—yes, that is so," admitted the other.

"Of course, with the existing mortgages it would be out of the question to raise it that way." Leonardson's voice was thoughtful, almost as though speaking to himself.

"Er——" began the still more perturbed peer.

"With a nominal income of thirty thousand a year, one can be surprisingly short of ready money," continued the financier.

Lord Mulford pulled himself together. Apparently his guest knew all about his affairs in some unexplained way. So much the better; the man would hardly have come down here to shoot if he meant him any harm.

He laughed in a rather half-hearted way, and resumed his genial, slightly ponderous manner.

"You are perfectly right, sir, one can. And, as you seem to be aware, that is my trouble. I do not want to part with my rights too cheaply, and yet I cannot obtain what I consider a fair offer from the only people I have approached."

"They are most likely acquainted with your

difficulties," the other put in drily. He knew all about these "people."

"Um—ah—possibly, that may be so."

"As it happens, my firm are anxious to acquire some additional fields in that part of England "

"Indeed."

"There is a possibility we may be able to come to some agreement—I should be glad to oblige any friend of D'Enville's—of course, if you have no objection?"

Lord Mulford had no objection, and Leonardson continued:

"Something in the nature of an equal share if we provide the working capital? One can easily fix up the exact particulars at some future time when you are not so occupied."

"I—er—am really—this has somewhat taken me by surprise. These things are rather outside my sphere—"

"And very much in mine! You and I need merely discuss the outlines, your solicitors will see that you are properly safeguarded when the time comes."

"My dear fellow, I am sure——" protested the other.

"Never trust your own brother in business, if you will take my advice, Lord Mulford."

"Ha, ha! Capital! But I have no doubt you are right. One has to do things in a businesslike way, I know."

"That is precisely my meaning. I presume, by-the-by, you are prepared to act as chairman—or in a similar capacity—in connection with this project?" he paused a moment, then added, "if anything definite *should* come of it?"

"I have not hitherto acted in such a capacity—in fact, I have my own opinions as to the advisability——"

Leonardson interrupted a shade sharply. He proposed to make a good deal of use of Lord Mulford's name in the future. These little cobwebs of scruples must be removed at once, and he had a brush for them.

"I am afraid it would be indispensable. But I do not for a moment suggest you should in any way go against your principles. We are not committed to anything." He paused again as his victim wriggled uncomfortably in his chair, visionary half-shares melting rapidly before his mind's eye. "But I should scarcely have imagined a colliery of your own would be in any way objectionable——"

"Ah, yes. Since you put it in that way, I perceive it alters the case. Being so inexperienced, I have feared to follow the example of fools and—er—'rush in' to these matters." The speaker chuckled at his small joke.

"And thereby you showed your discretion," remarked Leonardson, a little ambiguously. "It is no game for amateurs."

"I esteem myself extremely fortunate to have interested you," said Lord Mulford. "I shall be happy to resume our discussion when you are disposed. It is most kind of you."

"Not at all. I only hope nothing will turn up to prevent the ultimate fruition of the idea." Leonardson spoke carelessly, as though the matter was of no moment to him. Then he got up from his chair. The seed was sown and the soil virgin. No further working would be required. If anything, the plant would require checking. "I must not

monopolise your society in this way," I was forgetting, in the pleasure of our talk, that you have other guests."

The financier went to bed in a contented frame of mind. He had done well—very well. Lord Mulford was in his web, or as good as in; Baroness Metsor was most favourably impressed; Mrs. D'Enville was drifting in the direction he meant her to drift—even the boy Harry, not that he mattered greatly one way or the other, was more friendly. Yes, he was combining business and pleasure with no little ingenuity. That information regarding the vast seam of anthracite under Lord Mulford's estate had been made good use of.

The various strings he held frequently brought in facts which fitted together most prettily. Through the old money-lending business, which he still controlled, he knew of these mortgages on the Blotching estate. Otherwise the opportunity might have been missed, and the coal remained for some one else. A half-share—the confiding nobleman would find his interest represented by a fraction with a larger denominator than the figure 2 if the quality and extent of the coal had not been exaggerated. He dropped off to sleep as soon as his head touched the pillow, his last thought as to how well a really fine tiara, such as he could buy, would look on Maie D'Enville's magnificent hair.

Lord Mulford fussed into his wife's room when he got upstairs. She was reading in a chair by the fire for a few minutes before actually retiring to bed.

"That fellow Leonardson, my dear, he appears to be an intelligent sort of man."

"So I have discovered," she answered quietly

"I mean he is anxious to take up the question

of the coal at Blotching—you know I told you about it the other day "

Lady Mulford looked more interested.

" Is that so ? "

" Yes. I feel distinctly inclined to allow him the option of doing so," he announced importantly. One must keep up one's reputation and dignity before one's wife.

" How sweet of you ! "

He snorted. " Just like you women. You claim equal rights and so forth, and you can't even comment intelligently on anything serious. ' Sweet,' indeed."

Lady Mulford got up and took hold of her husband's tie, which she pulled undone.

" You silly old thing ! So you are going into business, are you ? I thought it was against your—principles "

" You don't understand, dear." He kissed her with affectionate condescension. " This is quite a respectable concern. A colliery of one's own can scarcely be called a wild speculation."

" It has progressed as far as that ? "

" Oh—ah—um—Well, I dare say things will be settled before long. Leonardson is exceedingly anxious for me to give my consent." He finished on his best note of good-humoured pomposity.

" I fear you are a humbug, Mulford."

" My dear Connie ! "

" Do you know you are following in the footsteps of that ' unscrupulous guinea-pig,' Charles D'Enville ? "

" Really now ! Charles goes in for any sort of flutter so long as he can pocket a few fees."

" Mark my words, my lord earl, your colliery is

the thin edge of the wedge. Don't you let me hear any more of your 'utter lack of commercial integrity,' or similar rubbish, for I shan't believe you."

Lord Mulford tried to appear angry, but failed, and burst out laughing. He was, like Leonardson, pleased with himself, and his visions took the form of unlimited numbers of really high pheasants streaming out of all his pet coverts. Being able to think of nothing worthy of the occasion, he picked his wife up, and deposited her, despite angry protests, on the bed.

"Don't dare speak to your husband like that," he said, and departed into his dressing-room.

CHAPTER X

In the morning it was possible to shoot and no more. Under the circumstances the pheasants came off best. A cold northerly wind blew up rain-storms at intervals, and, apart from the difficulty of bringing down high birds, hands were numbed and slow to obey the brams of the shooters.

Harry gained the satisfaction of seeing Leonardson perform indifferently enough to gratify his bitterest enemy, but he himself was in scarcely better case. Only his father and Tempest could deal with the situation with any approach to success.

A strong-flying pheasant twenty-five yards up in the air wants stopping at any time. Add another half-score of yards to the elevation, an extra twenty miles an hour to the pace, put in an icy wind strong enough to induce a marked curve in the flight, and the finest shot in creation will make a remarkably poor average with the further drawbacks of retarded circulation and a slower understanding between hand and eye.

No one was really sorry when heavy rain set in after lunch and put a final stop to the proceedings.

But Harry was no longer worrying over such trifles as Leonardson's ability to use a gun. His father had told him that he might consider the matter of his career definitely settled, and devote

himself to getting ready for the Sandhurst exam. This was owing, Mr. D'Enville stated, to the effect of Leonardson's good influence on their finances, and, whatever return might be possible, it was obligatory on them to make it.

This decision naturally occupied Harry's thoughts to the exclusion of all else at the time. To know exactly where he stood was a relief. He could look forward to a life which appealed to him. The qualifying exam. was nothing to a boy of his ability, and it was a practical certainty he could pass. Several of his contemporaries at Eton, fellows he knew and got on with, would be going into the same regiment. There was a family connection with it in the past, and he had met some of the present officers. Altogether the prospect was exceedingly pleasant, and Harry began to think that, if it was due to Leonardson, the latter's good points might conceivably counterbalance his deficiencies.

Undoubtedly that gentleman had laid the first few stones of his new edifice most happily. Everyone seemed ready to take him at his own valuation. His plans, well-conceived, were working out even better than he had counted upon. The ladies, too, evidently saw no reason to treat him in any way as unacceptable. Lord Mulford, whom he had only seen once before this visit, when Charles D'Enville invited them both to lunch in connection with the financier's election to the club he now belonged to, was almost falling over himself with anxiety to touch the wealth he was convinced Leonardson could extract from his coalfields. Nothing was too good for him here, clearly. The conscientious peer who would not go a step out of his way to look at speculative schemes found no difficulty, when his

cupidity was even slightly aroused, in combining forces with a man about whom he knew practically nothing beyond the fact that he was accounted a millionaire, in a project about which he actually knew still less.

Leonardson smiled to himself at the notion. Since the Mulford connection was valuable to him in many ways, and the family were related to a great many people he might later on desire to be brought in touch with, there was no objection to treating Lord Mulford himself in a straightforward, even generous way.

In return he would earn their gratitude ; which would be of some value, since he would continue to hold the key to it.

While the scheming brain of the erstwhile pawnbroker's assistant was weighing facts and balancing probabilities as he stood waiting outside the coverts, he himself occupied the minds of the female section of the party almost to the exclusion of all else.

The Baroness was enthusiastic, Lady Mulford amused, her elder daughter interested, and Florence Kirby, the girl, alone in expressing a decided prejudice against him on account of his looking like a "piece of polished ebony."

"Why, you talk as if he were a nigger," said Lady Mulford.

"So he might be, underneath," the girl maintained.

"You are as bad as Harry was when he first saw him," smiled Mrs. D'Enville, "but he has got over it."

"And so will you, my dear," the Baroness added to Florence, "when you grow a little older."

"Not I," Florence replied, "I always stick to first impressions."

Her mother laughed.

"That is because you have hardly lived long enough to arrive at a second edition."

"Well, I don't like him and I won't."

Her sister broke in :

"There is something about the man which compels attention," she declared. "I suppose nobody knows where he comes from?"

They all looked at Mrs. D'Enville, and she responded easily enough :

"The usual factory for millionaires, I suppose, wherever that may be."

"I expect it is a pretty 'shady' spot," put in Lady Mulford in an ironical tone.

"This one looks as though he came from the darkest side, too, judging from his complexion," interjected Florence pertly. The remark caused some amusement, and Florence was happy.

"We shall have our young friend falling in love with him at this rate," said the Baroness.

"Thanks," retorted the girl, "I prefer Europeans."

"Be quiet, Florrie," her mother said, "you are becoming personal. Mr. Leonardson is old enough to be your father."

"I know he is rich enough for anything, and I believe papa and he are going in for some business together," the girl said. "I overheard them talking about it before breakfast. I should give him a wide berth if it was me."

Maie D'Enville pondered. She had been unfavourably impressed by Leonardson herself at first sight—then the magnetism of the man had drawn

her and she forgot her prejudice. Harry had taken an immediate dislike to him, and this girl apparently had done the same. There was something queer, almost uncanny, about the man; but he was a personality, and to be treated with respect if not with affection. When she found a chance of getting Lady Mulford alone she asked her:

"Is John really going in with Mr. Leonardson?"

"Apparently."

"He is an extraordinary person. I am beginning to think he must be a sort of magician."

"Why, Maie, what is there so remarkable about this new departure?"

"I believe-- don't repeat this-- he intended to do it when he came."

"Oh!" remarked Lady Mulford thoughtfully, "did he? John seemed to imagine it was his own idea. This dark gentleman is a person of some capacity, evidently. How are you progressing yourself, Maie?"

Mrs. D'Enville did not reply directly. She did not know herself. Her usual light, more or less harmless method of dealing with men, which had carried her through up to the present, seemed to be an inadequate weapon with which to confront the masterful determination of Leonardson's manner with her now. She no longer felt confident of her ability to control the movements of this "tiger" within the limits she had originally decided were desirable. It was no good blinking facts, and she was conscious that she could hardly define herself what their relative positions were at the moment, still less where this headstrong steed would lead her finally. She hoped Charles would soon be inde-

pendent of him, but the more she knew of the man the less was she able to persuade herself that Charles was likely to be more than the merest tool in his hands. Suppose he did not choose that they should ever be free of his influence, that he did not intend them to get out of the web? She realised, with the curious mixture of apprehension and excitement which she had experienced more than once in her dealings with Leonardson, that, if he chose, there could be no doubt as to his power to control their lives—to the extent of controlling their income. Since this item was an essential constituent of existence for both of them, there did not appear to be much difference in the two.

While recognising this she hoped that, by some stroke of fortune, things might so eventuate that they would regain their independence—however, the prospect certainly appeared remote. As well might the salmon, caught in the wide meshes of the fisherman's net as he dashed eagerly towards the well-remembered shallows in the fresh clean river, struggle and twist and turn in the vain effort to break the strong twine. Lucky beyond belief almost were he to succeed, even with the loss of a fin or with lacerated sides, in breaking through into the quiet pool beyond. Nevertheless, reflected Mrs. D'Enville, if there is one thing more certain than another, it is that the future will bring what one least expects. At least, her experience led her to suppose so.

"You appear to be in some doubt," remarked Lady Mulford at last. Her friend was gazing absently at nothing instead of answering.

"I was wondering," she replied hesitatingly.

"Is there some unexpected development?"

The other sighed. Then she turned resolutely and tried to collect her thoughts.

"Does Mr. Leonardson strike you as a man who would allow any scruple, any principle, to prevent his attaining an object upon which he set his mind? To tell the truth, he frightens me. I feel like a mouse in a trap for some reason—as though he had wanted Charles and me for some purpose—that he will use us for that purpose, and, when done with, calmly discard us—if that is his whim."

"I should not imagine he has 'whims,'" replied Lady Mulford, "any more than a piece of granite. As for 'principles,' they are hopelessly out of date. No self-respecting member of society wastes his time indulging any such childlike fantasies."

She glanced mockingly at her companion.

"There," she continued, "does that satisfy your present morbid outlook on life?"

The other laughed. "Yes, you are right. The creature is getting on my nerves. He is so calmly superior and assured that I exaggerate his powers."

"I know what you mean," admitted Lady Mulford. "Of course there is that about him. Possibly he may be one of those gifted individuals who always succeed in what they undertake—who trample over every obstacle. We shall see. But, Maie, tell me, are you afraid of him for yourself?"

"I don't know. Why should I fear, or anything else, him? He can't eat me!"

"I have never known you so disturbed about a man before. You must be in love with him."

Mrs. D'Enville shuddered.

"Don't joke about it." Then she looked up with a smile. "You make me feel as though a goose was walking over my grave, Connie. I must be

either contracting senile decay or a bad liver if I can't manage a man——"

"Who admires you," put in Lady Mulford.

"I can't prevent that. Charles naturally wants to keep in with him, and he is evidently anxious to be friendly."

"Quite so," said the other satirically, "but if you are as worried as all that, I should hardly think the game worth the candle."

"It is a **very** big candle," replied Mrs. D'Entville, "and might burn away for the rest of our lives."

"It also might singe your wings in the process."

"Well, let's hope it won't. I may be looking for a mare's nest. It is this disgustingly cold wind. It blows all the optimism out of one. Don Quixote would have lost conceit with the finest windmill in existence if he had lived in this climate."

"I am glad to observe signs of convalescence," responded Lady Mulford. "Come along, it is time for lunch, and if the rain doesn't stop they will be back from shooting soon. They can't go on in this."

"I want to see us placed upon a 'sound financial footing'—whatever that may be," said Mrs. D'Entville. "Harry shall never know what it is to live with a perpetual dressmaker hanging over his head."

"I hope not—sincerely. Poor boy!"

"Well, tailor then. I don't suppose there's much to choose."

"How old we are getting, Maie. He will be 'out' soon. I believe he is the only thing you really care for. But he is a dear boy. I am not surprised."

"There is nothing I wouldn't do to make him happy," said his mother fervently. "I would give anything in the world to save him from the bitter-

ness of disillusion, the misery of loneliness, the gradual death of all belief in humanity that I——" she broke off. "I shall have to go on the stage."

"Or take a pill, dear. Come along and eat."

"So wags our little world," observed Mrs. D'Enville with a laugh. "Everything ends in meals."

"Or smoke," added Lady Mulford.

CHAPTER XI

The next ~~two~~ days passed cheerfully as far as the party were collectively concerned. Leonardson continued his successful course, and even Florence Kirby fell to some extent under the spell of his attraction. He laid himself out to please her, did not take offence at anything she said, and wore down gradually the feeling of antagonism she clearly entertained against him. It was all practice, he considered. Since it was neither desirable nor possible to ride rough-shod over these people-- as he could now over such of his commercial *confrères* as offended him--it was well to learn how to manage them. He took her for a drive in his motor the last afternoon, when the shooting was over, and talked to her of the delights of London as he conceived they would appeal to a young girl. The opera he knew. He loved the music and the grandeur of the effects--they gratified his love of sensuous enjoyment--and he knew how to talk of money and its power so that he dazzled her.

"He seems like a kind of magician," she said to Harry.

"Waves his wand and produces what you require, eh?" he inquired sarcastically.

"I should think he could, pretty well, judging from the amount of money he seems to have."

"Oh, he stinks of cash, my dear. Don't you think he looks the part?"

"Anyhow, I am going to stay with him next season when mother and father go. I shall be 'out' then."

"My word!" said Harry mockingly, "unhappy man. He is presuming on his powers of resistance. Shall you accept him?"

As they were sitting in the saloon after dinner she merely annihilated him with a look—or intended to do so. Harry seemed to bear up under it surprisingly well.

"Little boys should be seen and not heard," she remarked cuttingly. "I know you don't like him. No doubt you are jealous."

"If you give me the hint when I am in the way I will be an admirable gooseberry."

The girl laughed. "Silly boy. It isn't funny. As if I should look at an old creature like that."

"Wait till he gives you a few diamonds," jeered Harry. "You won't find him so ancient then. No woman, whatever her age, can resist such delicate attentions."

He affected an air of sententious finality. Lady Florence put her nose in the air.

"You are beneath contempt, malapert youth."

"For the sake of our early friendship, perhaps you will throw me a crust when you pass me in your motor brougham sweeping a crossing."

"Motor broughams don't sweep crossings," she declared, getting up. "I am going to find better company than you." She got a chair and drew it up by Leonardson, who was playing bridge.

"I am flattered," said the latter.

"Not at all, only I dislike cubs," she answered in a voice calculated to reach Harry.

"All right," rejoined Harry, "cubs grow up into foxes, but cubbesses into vixens;" he laid a strong emphasis on the last word.

Lord Mulford, who was at the same table as Leonardson, laughed.

"Don't squabble, children; we are trying to hold our own against Mr. Leonardson, and it is precious hard work without any distractions."

Leonardson smiled slowly. "Bridge is a special hobby of mine. I always think it is a good test of one's ability to discern the characters of other people. They usually give an observer many opportunities of judging."

"Oh dear," broke in the Baroness, who was Lord Mulford's partner. "You make me quite nervous. What have you not found out about me by this time?"

"That you are hard-hearted," the financier returned.

She giggled appreciatively. During the past two days she considered him safely landed for her "salon," as she termed it, and was highly pleased in consequence.

"If that is all, I shall not be afraid of playing with you again in London."

"I hope no one will ever be afraid of playing with me," he smiled at Mrs. D'Enville, his partner.

"I would rather play with you than against you, Mr. Leonardson," said Florence Kirby demurely, "you always win."

The Baroness was dealing and they were free to talk a moment.

"I agree with you," smiled the Baroness; "need-

less to say, we are losing. Mr. Leonardson is a bad opponent."

Maie D'Enville took up her hand without speaking. Harry had come up behind her, and was looking over the cards as she sorted them.

The Baroness left the declaration to Lord Mulford. "Hearts," he said.

"May I play, partner?" asked Leonardson, with a curious accentuation of the last word.

She could not but notice he was watching her intently, and knew his words fitted in to the preceding conversation.

"Yes," she replied, then hesitated, "please."

That night as she went upstairs to her room after staying a minute with the girl Florence, she met Leonardson coming along the passage, having changed into a smoking-coat.

"What luck," he remarked, "can I have a word with you? See, here is a comfortable sofa."

He took the candle from her hand and indicated the piece of furniture in question placed in a recess in the gallery.

She sat down at once and he placed himself beside her; his voice was low, but full of a kind of suppressed insistence which it never occurred to her to disregard.

"Mrs. D'Enville," he said, "how do we stand?"

"In what way?" she asked.

"One must either advance or go back in one's relations with human beings. It is impossible to remain at a fixed point."

"And?"

"You must know it is my desire—my very ardent desire—to advance in your regard." He did not

raise his tones at all, but still spoke with the tenseness which marked his greeting of her.

"Well, I see no reason for you to suppose your desire is not being gratified." She twisted a ring nervously on her finger.

"I fancied somehow you were erecting a barrier, a sign-post with 'Halt' upon it."

She laughed at this, but the laugh was forced. This sign-post had another word inscribed upon it in black letters, and that word to her was "Danger." Where he saw "Halt" she read the more sinister signal.

It was true enough. She was perturbed, was struggling to hold up this very post. The necessity had arisen more quickly than she had foreseen. Already she sought, without any fixed resolution, to avoid the occasions likely to lead to her being left alone with him. With other people present she did not mind, and she must keep on the right side of him still. It was almost ridiculous that she should be in such a case, but the fact was not altered thereby. Then Harry, though he said nothing now against Leonardson, clearly did not like the unmistakable emphasis of his attentions to her.

Once this party broke up she would not see him for a while. This was clearly the thing to do. If he liked the hook there was no necessity to worry about playing him—sufficient to leave the line in the water, he would not break away. Yes, she must get off to the Riviera or Egypt, perhaps, till the summer. In the meanwhile the barb might be driven well home in case of accidents.

"One does not require such things for one's friends."

"Then it was my imagination?"

" Obviously."

" And there is no barrier for me to be afraid of ? "

He leaned towards her from his corner of the sofa, and the action brought his face into the radius of the light from her candle—burning on a table outside the recess. It struck her that he resembled some vigorous relentless spirit. His florid colouring, coal-black hair and white, even teeth made three strong contrasts. Undeniably the man possessed physical as well as mental fascination. But, at the same time, Mrs. D'Enville instinctively rebelled against the idea. He appealed solely to the lower side of her nature, and she remembered who and what he was.

" Friendship need know no barrier," she repeated.

" That is no answer. I do not think I could be with you much —and be content with friendship."

She leaned forward and moved her dress more over her foot as women do when their knees are crossed.

" I fancy it would not hurt you to go without something. It might be a new experience."

" It is one I have no wish to undergo—or intention. But listen to me. Some months past I saw you for the first time. You were at the opera—in Lord Lancashire's box. Do you remember ? "

" So long ago ? " She thought a moment. " Yes, I recall the circumstance. I was exceedingly bored."

" You did not look it. I thought then, as I do now, that I had never seen a woman more fit for a throne."

" You are very complimentary," she said easily, but her hands trembled slightly as she twisted the ring again.

"I learned your name from a companion. You were married. That was a misfortune. However, I felt I must know you. Your husband was at my hand, so to speak, and you are aware of the rest."

Her laugh sounded hollow and lost in the empty silent gallery. Not a soul was about upstairs, and not a sound reached them from the men below in the distant smoking-room.

"So Charles was only required for the introduction? That is more flattering to me than to him."

"We are not children," he went on, "and there is no need to dissimulate between us. What did you think I meant to-night at bridge?"

"Really, I am overwhelmed," she said in a mocking tone—but it was an effort. "That Mr. Leonardson should pay me these tributes is more than enough to turn my head."

"Tchut," he muttered, "I am in earnest."

"And I must go to bed. Such behaviour as this is most unseemly at my age. You should get Florrie to keep you company if you like it. She might imagine it romantic."

"She rather resembles you," he said. "I admire her."

"Probably she would have no objection, girls don't as a rule."

"My wife," he continued slowly, "will have a great position. No queen will be richer, less as powerful."

"She will be a person to be envied. Are you thinking seriously of Florrie? If so, I shall begin to make up to her. I shall have a claim as a poor relation." The flippancy was less forced. Mrs.

D'Enville felt safer, for some reason, as though she had no immediate peril to fear.

"Suppose you had not been married," he murmured, "or had been a widow, I should have looked no further."

Again she mocked him with an easy assurance which pleased him intensely. He did not know the curious influence he exercised upon her; he was determined she should understand his programme up to a point, and he meant to inform her now.

"I always tell Charles D'Enville he is in my way," she said. "Think what dresses I might have had!"

"Had he chanced not to be?" he inquired, his voice almost hissing through his teeth.

She yawned and put her hand in front of her mouth.

"Fancy expecting me to solve hypothetical conundrums at bed-time."

"Is that all you will say?" He smiled now with a complete change of manner.

"I don't think many women would refuse you, Mr. Leonardson." She got up. "I really must go to bed. Good-night."

She held out her hand, which he took in his own. Whenever he touched her she felt the same odd thrill as of some unexpected shock of electricity.

He stood gravely in front of her, still holding her hand.

"The time is not yet. But should I be in the position to renew this conversation at the point we now leave it, I will make it hard for you to be an exception to your statement."

There was no reason for him to show her all his meaning--since he meant her to be his wife. He never wasted ammunition. He raised her hand to

his lips with his eyes fixed on hers, and she allowed him passively, with no motion to stop him, though she would have prevented it but for a kind of mesmerising effect his look seemed to produce on her.

"Good-night, Maie," he said, allowing the name to linger on his tongue, as though he were loth to part with it. "You would be a queen indeed."

He turned abruptly and made his way downstairs. She watched him go, expecting him to turn round; but he did not. At last she shivered, and, taking up the candle, moved slowly to her room, a prey to discomposing thoughts.

Presently she went to Lady Mulford and stayed with her a long time, chatting gaily, till she was almost turned out. She wanted company.

When Leonardson reached the smoking-room Lord Mulford looked up and said,

"Hullo, we thought you must have gone to bed. What's been keeping you?"

"I chanced to hit upon something in connection with my affairs, and took the opportunity of working it out roughly."

Charles D'Enville raised his glass.

"Here's to a successful dénouement. I hope it concerns our joint venture."

"I think it may do," replied Leonardson.

CHAPTER XII

Shortly after his return to London, Howard Leonardson moved into his new residence, where he inhabited a few rooms until the final elaborate plans of decoration and furnishing should be brought to completion. He wished to keep an eye on the details himself and see that nothing went wrong. His early training still made it painful to spend money without knowing he got a proper return for it, and he liked to watch proceedings for himself -- even when thousands of pounds were being lavished like water.

One Saturday morning in the middle of March, Charles D'Enville called on him in Carlton House Terrace by appointment. He was admitted by an impassive butler, who conducted him to a fine room at the back of the house which the financier used for transacting any business which did not call him to the City.

The visitor was astonished at the magnificence of the final achievement. He had not seen the place for some time, and, notwithstanding his knowledge that Leonardson intended to spare neither money nor trouble in obtaining a unique result, the actual imposing splendour, the fine taste, the skill and ingenuity with which every feature of the building had been made the most of—above all, the self-evident

perfection of every individual picture, piece of furniture, statuary, in fact, of every detail—combined to form a masterpiece of effective, yet distinguished and refined display.

Clearly he had known whom to employ, thought D'Enville as he entered the millionaire's sanctum.

"Good-morning, D'Enville. Sit down, will you?" said the owner.

"I congratulate you, my dear fellow, most heartily. It appears splendid—almost unreal. I am much looking forward to going over the whole," responded the visitor, taking the proffered seat.

"Thanks. Glad you like it. The finishing touch was put on this morning. Since I last saw you I have become the possessor of Balrig Castle also. I intend that to be the substance of which this is the shadow."

"Not the Duke's place!"

Charles D'Enville sat up in his surprise. Balrig was known to be on the market privately—at a million and a half. Even he was taken aback at this evidence of Leonardson's unlimited resources. The castle was vast and the estate near two hundred thousand acres.

"Formerly," returned the new owner calmly. "But now we must get to work. I have two or three matters to discuss with you."

"Very happy," exclaimed the other.

"Owing to our both being away at different times, I haven't seen you for some six weeks now."

"That is so."

"I will commence with a short résumé of your position. Mitchet Court, your place in Surrey, is very heavily mortgaged, up to about one and a half times its utmost value in these bad times."

"Yes," agreed D'Enville, looking a little disconcerted.

"I control the mortgagees. Outside that, all your floating capital is now locked up in the Klangor mine and the 'Ubique' Company."

"Yes," came doubtfully from the other.

"When the remaining ten shillings per share were called up on your twenty thousand Klangors, it was my happiness to lend you the required amount, as you—well—did not have it available."

"Yes, of course, I was greatly obliged, but knowing the value of the property——"

"Quite so. I may tell you the 'Ubique' Company is at this moment in a distinctly critical state. I happen to be in the position to close down the works or else re-establish them on a thoroughly satisfactory basis."

"Indeed, I had no idea——"

"Directors usually haven't—but no matter. In addition to these you have your fees from three or four companies and the marriage settlement of fifteen thousand pounds."

"Exactly. You seem excellently posted in my affairs, my dear fellow, but I don't quite see——"

"You will in a moment. That, I fancy, completes the tale of the various bulwarks between yourself and bankruptcy."

"I sincerely hope adequate bulwarks, too," smiled D'Enville.

"That entirely depends upon yourself."

"I—I don't quite follow."

"I believe I am correct in stating that our primary understanding was to the effect that you were to do certain things for me in return for the

seat **you** now have on the board of the Klanger Company?"

"Perfectly—so far as anything definite was said."

Mr. D'Enville was perplexed. He wondered what in the world this concise statement of his affairs was leading up to.

"So that I have performed my share of the bargain?"

"Most certainly you have; and a bit more, n., dear fellow."

"Good. You on your side introduced me to your wife, secured my election to various clubs and generally gave me good value. So there we may say that we are quits?" he raised his eyebrows and smiled agreeably.

D'Enville assented, and the financier resumed:

"Now, before I am prepared to continue our 'partnership' let us call it there is one other circumstance in which your active co-operation is indispensable."

"I am sure I shall be glad —" began the other.

"That will be all the better," interrupted Leonardson, "but first let me enlighten you as to its nature."

D'Enville looked expectant.

"It is my intention to marry Mrs. D'Enville before the year is out—stay," he raised a warning hand as D'Enville half rose from his chair, his eyes full of wonder, and his mouth half-open. "I admit the remark may sound abrupt, but I always like to be understood."

Charles D'Enville caught hold of his collar in front and pulled it away from his neck.

"Sir!" he ejaculated, rising.

"Pray remain seated," interposed the financier quickly. "There is no occasion for emotion."

D'Enville sank down again. His brain whirled. It was one thing for him to neglect and ignore his wife, it was another entirely for her to marry someone else. This Leonardson, too! Underneath his eagerness to please the money-prince lay the hereditary contempt of the aristocrat for the man of the people—always ready to flash out when women and marriage were in question. Pure sentiment and probably foolish, but still human and by no means uncommon, even in these democratic days.

D'Enville was taken by surprise for the moment; it seemed to him that Leonardson was presuming beyond his limit. There were some things a fellow could not put up with. Then an idea struck him.

"It is all very well for you to talk like that, but she happens to be *my* wife, and the law, I fancy, has some objection to sudden changes which are made public." His voice was sneering.

Leonardson cowed.

"Marriages can be dissolved. Suppose, my friend, you give a few minutes' careful consideration to what I have said—" he fixed D'Enville with his eye—"in conjunction with my remarks anent your finances."

The other began to regain a normal sense of proportion. He followed Leonardson's advice, and applied his by no means sluggish intellect to the question. What did he mean? By Jove, yes! He would smash him; he *could*, unless he fell in with this project. Damn it all—it was too much! Let him do his worst.

"You have yet something to learn, Mr. Leonardson," he said with some dignity. "Gentlemen are

somehow prejudiced in these matters." He moved to the door, and the other watched with a gleam of amusement in his eye.

"Before you go—to beggary," he spoke very distinctly, "let me put it to you what will happen. The Klanger mine will not start working until I give the word—you appreciate that? The 'Ubique' will go into liquidation. Mitchet Court will be sold for a song. Your other companies are worth," he snapped his fingers, "if I choose. Mrs. D'Enville's debts and your own are not inconsiderable. Your son will leave Eton. Your wife will welcome you, I imagine, as a man of genius. You yourself will eke out a cheerful existence as an undischarged bankrupt in, say, Tooting or Brussels."

Charles D'Enville paused. Damn the fellow! What he said was the bare truth. It might be as well to go a little further into it before defying him.

"On the other hand," resumed Leonardson, "if you are sensible—you are a man of the world—the mine will commence operations forthwith and pay at least thirty per cent. the first year. 'Ubique' will continue to prosper, ditto your other companies. I will make you a—present—of the Mitchet mortgages. I may be allowed—without lacerating your feelings—to suggest that you and Mrs. D'Enville are scarcely a fond couple. You will be free to marry again if you desire——"

"I shall feel obliged by your omitting to comment on my relations with Mrs. D'Enville," put in that lady's husband.

"I will confine myself to essentials. There is only one other lady whose name need be mentioned. I refer to Miss Fitz-Nevil."

D'Enville sat down again a little abruptly. His air of hauteur grew less marked.

"Er—I beg pardon?"

"No doubt your friendship with the lady is no secret to a good many of your acquaintances. It is not an extravagant price to pay for letting the public into your confidence also."

"What is not?"

"Some fifteen thousand a year. That sum will approximately represent the almost immediate difference between your income if you allow your present speculations to mature, and the interest on your marriage settlement at three per cent."

"Possibly I was a trifle precipitate just now——"

"Pray don't mention it," said Leonardson smoothly. "I cried myself on the side of directness."

"I should be glad to know the precise terms of your proposal," D'Enville remarked after a pause.

He wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. This man had upset his equanimity in no slight degree. His innate selfishness had begun to work on the situation, and any quixotic notions of high-mindedness appeared melodramatic as between two such men as Leonardson and himself. The world was a place in which one must give and take. Let those who cared run their heads against brick walls, he had no intention of doing so.

After all, in these days, no one really bothered who one was or what one did so long as one's banking account could be given as a reference. Fifteen thousand a year is not to be picked up in the street.

The heaven was working.

"It is unfortunate that the matter has to be made

so public, but I fear there is no alternative to your allowing yourself to be divorced."

"I?" The speaker stared. This was no joke.

"You see, your--er--relations with the lady we have mentioned are so notorious--if you will forgive my saying so--that it would scarcely be practicable for you to be the petitioner."

"You go too far. It is absurd."

"Just think a moment longer. A year's trip on the Continent. An undefended suit. A nine days' *cause célèbre*, no more, and when you return the whole thing blown over. You will be free, rich, still young. Why--you will have the world at your feet!"

"I must have time."

"Sleep on it, by all means."

"No, hang it all, there is Harry," said his father, with a tardy thought for the boy. "It will do him no good, and he is my son."

It will scarcely befit him to be obliged to give up his career and find some means of extracting a living from his wits. There is not much opening for delightful young gentlemen of his kind to-day in the worker's mart."

"But--but--"

"Whereas when I am his step-father, I will see to it that he is no loser. Why--rather than let that stand in the way--I will guarantee to make him a millionaire by the time he comes of age; he shall enter my business."

"Humph!" ejaculated Mr. D'Enville.

Certainly the boy would be no better off if he declined this arrangement. If he agreed, Maie would scarcely suffer in a worldly sense. The wife of the coming king of finance--she would not be likely

to complain. He thought of her extravagant tastes and love of display which she had never been able to indulge. No- he had only himself to consider - it is wonderful how many people are unable to discern the presence or absence of the letters "un" before the word "selfish" - should he consent? After all, he would really be doing both Maie and Harry a good turn - in the end. There was the temporary unpleasantness - but she would be the petitioner in the case. He began to see himself in the light of a magnanimous benefactor. Hang it all, everyone scored all round but himself - stay - he got fifteen thousand a year. But Leonardson said he would make Harry a millionaire. A man of the world would not hesitate, surely, in such a position? It was not - Leonardson was right there, at - though he and Maie were a devoted couple; and what was a divorce, after all? He was no boy, he knew the side-streets and alleys of life as well as the main thoroughfares, and he could number on his fingers those of his intimates who would be in the position to hold up their hands in rebuke. Indeed, those with the least to hide themselves would be the last to condemn another - it was always the guilty who most loudly protested their own innocence by shrieking scorn at those who broke the eleventh commandment by being found out in breaking the seventh.

Charles D'Enville drew a deep breath.

"There is much in what you say."

A smile curled the other's lips. Although he had foreseen this conclusion to the scene, he could not repress the slight sign of triumph at the justification of his estimate of D'Enville.

"I do not wish to coerce your judgment," the

financier said with hidden irony ; " take a night to think things over, as I suggested."

" Let me hear your ideas," muttered the now conquered man.

" In the first place you will merely inform Mrs. D'Enville of the proposed alteration in her condition as regards yourself. I must choose my own time for the later development."

" As you please," remarked the other. He began to see a little more light. He was necessary to Leonardson in this transaction, therefore his consent was proportionately more valuable.

" On the day I marry Mrs. D'Enville," Leonardson broke in on his thought, " I will treble your then income. You will get a lead of your son then."

Leonardson's words sounded even more magnificent than the bare facts behind the statements could fairly be held to justify. He could not help making the most of his goods—it was hereditary. Since Harry D'Enville was to be his step-son, it would be no great call upon his generosity to put the boy in the position he might be expected to occupy. Besides, he was looking ahead. Harry was one of the levers which might be required—Leonardson honestly hoped not—in dealing with his intended wife.

During the past two months he had seen a good deal of her, and his first desire to possess her had grown into an overmastering passion. The man was determined that she should be his. Her breeding and her beauty had equally appealed to him from the first, and now it was herself, the woman, he wanted. She had aroused the best and worst in a strong man's soul. He harboured no fan-

tastic ideals on the subject of marriage, but this was no passing fancy. Mrs. D'Enville was his mate—she should be his wife. Nothing should stand in his way. As it was, there appeared to be no insuperable obstacle, no serious one even. He wanted her love, though—that this high-bred lady should return his passion. But his resolve was fixed, and he must have her with or without her love. And what a wife, he thought. A woman fit to adorn any state—wasted on this feeble creature before him. She would know how to appreciate what he could give her. Jewels, palaces, every conceivable luxury of extravagance the heart of a human being could desire—or so he conceived it.

At any rate, he thought he was sufficiently acquainted with her character to calculate the influence such considerations would exercise upon it—and she was not indifferent to him now, or he greatly mistook her. Charles D'Enville could have his money—as much as necessary, but *his* body and soul were dear at any price, and Leonardson would never pay more than was expedient, even in such a case as this. Thinking thus he resumed :

“She must be free as soon as the law can make her. I am ready now. Will you arrange to go abroad for a year—or what?”

“Of course, we must have some undertaking.”

“I am quite willing,” assented Leonardson. “No doubt we can easily arrive at a satisfactory arrangement.”

For some minutes the two men reviewed the case, and Charles D'Enville was agreeably surprised to find that the financier would be prepared to pay high enough to satisfy his own most optimistic notions.

There was very little to do really. They decided upon the precise terms of the deal quickly enough.

Leonardson, having made up his mind, wished to complete the matter off-hand. He also knew that what he offered would appear to the other man as magnificent at the moment; whereas, if he waited, D'Enville's cupidity might get to work and induce him to try and extract still more. "Strike while the iron is hot," he always found a wise aphorism.

As a matter of fact, since the shares in the Klanger mine alone would eventually make D'Enville something like a millionaire in the ordinary course of events, he would not be denuding his own pocket to any alarming extent.

Having arrived at an agreement, Leonardson drew up a rough draft of it, which they both signed.

"It only remains for Mrs. D'Enville to fall into line," remarked her husband.

"Have you any doubt?" queried Leonardson, with a cynical laugh.

"That is your business."

"Quite so. But we are working together."

"To the best of my ability," D'Enville assured him.

"You undertake that you will use your best endeavours to persuade your wife?"

"But I cannot answer for her."

"The day the divorce proceedings commence I will give you the Mitchet mortgages and set your affairs generally on a sound basis. I do not pay for her until she is *my* wife—and the further sum is dependent on that happy event."

"But——"

give you my word. It is usually considered sufficient. In the other matter I prefer the more elaborate process to prevent any misunderstanding—since it is rather a large sum.”

D’Enville ran over the heads of the business in his mind once more. It was good enough. He held out his hand.

“Agreed,” he observed, in a slightly higher key than usual.

Leonardson took the hand gravely. He despised the man before him, but he had no notion that a more squeamish individual might have hesitated before shaking hands with him—even considering that his—Leonardson’s—own conduct did not err on the side of nice feeling. The dirt which accumulates on money would seem to spread to the souls of those who devote these appanages to its acquirement, stifling all such unbusinesslike qualities as honour and shame. There undoubtedly are men who would allow themselves to be divorced for a smaller sum than half a million pounds, and yet there probably was a period in their lives when they would have blushed with honest shame at the bare idea. But age brings discretion—or so we are led to believe. One seems to have heard of other men, who deliberately permit their name to be smirched in the Courts in order to set free a woman they happen to love, but who finds life with them tiresome. It does not necessarily follow that the same symptoms indicate a particular disease in every case. Yet Charles D’Enville became firmly convinced that he was, if not noble, at least acting in the best interests of his family by falling in with Leonardson’s proposition.

Undoubtedly gold is an eloquent pleader, with no

little ability to sway the jury of a man's conscience and convince that weak judge—his mind.

"I shall see you later then—with Mrs. D'Enville and the boy—to dinner?" Leonardson remarked, as his accomplice finally rose to take his departure.

"Yes," assented D'Enville.

Now the die was cast he saw no reason for worrying—indeed, he flattered himself that few people could come to a decision, and having done so, adhere to it with such strong-minded determination as himself. It is not difficult—indeed, it saves trouble—to have one's mind made up by someone else. Weakness and obstinacy, usually held to be colleagues, can thereby preen themselves in the belief that they are strength and resolution. It is a sorry masquerade.

"It will be a curious party," he added.

"We may, without conceit, pride ourselves on exceptional success in handling what might be regarded as a difficult situation."

"With considerable *savoir faire*," said D'Enville lightly; "it is seldom a family dinner is attended by two heads."

"There is no one else coming. Mrs. D'Enville perhaps will act as hostess?" Leonardson's eyes glittered.

"One might almost call it a rehearsal," D'Enville declared with a chuckle.

Pride of race had constituted *his* only reason for opposing the transference of his wife to another man—for a consideration. Pride of race and honour being archaic luxuries, the price has gone down. Even the D'Enville brands seemed to be at a discount when confronted by a suitable "honorarium." Possibly,

however, all D'Envilles did not value them at the same figure.

They discussed a few further details of importance, and Charles D'Enville departed.

Left to himself, Leonardson paced the floor of his room for some time. Many thoughts crowded in upon him. He saw a small, alert boy with wild black eyes running loose in Whitechapel, a source of terror to those younger than himself, and treated with some respect by his bigger companions. No one cared to fight him then ; he never gave in, and was as tough and wiry as whipcord. His mother's wild blood was more developed than the paternal instinct to cringe.

He saw also a boy in his teens, shrewd, old for his years, the equal of the keenest in a contest of wits. Afterwards came the birth of real ambition, a comprehension of what might be won in the world. As he progressed up the ladder the rungs were kicked away ruthlessly. He remembered how he first realised that he was not equipped for mixing with "toffs," and, with the realisation, the resolve to fit himself for the highest society in the land. Success had followed by slower degrees here. He had so much to forget, to unlearn. But now his slightly abrupt but assured manner and perfect self-possession would carry him anywhere. The former impressed and the latter gave him command over any situation. If people scoffed behind his back they would not to his face, and, after all, he stood for the real deity of mammon—gold.

On the flood of a huge majority he would ride to power and place. If, here and there, a few strange beings withstood the might of his money, they

would form a perfectly negligible minority, and could not possibly affect the ultimate issue.

Why had he waited so long? Ten years before he was rich—really rich—but he told himself he had been wise. His position was paramount now, not half a dozen men in the world controlled such interests, and to reach this point had demanded every hour of his time, all the concentrated power of his intellect. He had been right—half-measures are obsolete.

It was curious this vain, beautiful woman should have obsessed him now to the exclusion of every other desire in life. Heretofore he had contracted no tie to hamper him. Very early he recognised the folly of marrying from his own class, and no sentiment was allowed to interfere with the career he had mapped out.

Somehow the fact of her being already married enhanced her value from the outset. He liked obstacles, real obstacles, for the pleasure of surmounting them. At first he entertained no definite idea of marriage. That had come when Maie D'Enville was lucky, or unlucky, enough to stir the depths of his being. Her careless love of gaiety, her wit and, above all, the type of her beauty, a type he had never met before on equal terms, gripped him irresistibly—doubtless to some extent because she chanced to be the first of her class who attracted him. At any rate, Leonardson was consumed with the flame of desire. Even so he did not regret the delay. His prize would be the more precious. In the pride of his strength he acknowledged no possibility of defeat or failure.

That night she would come to his house. The first guest—her husband did not count—since the

work had been completed. She should see a little of what he could do—what his brain could plan, his wealth carry out.

Any woman would appreciate the compliment. She would understand he meant her to. Was Mrs. D'Enville likely to refuse a man who could make her the equal of queens? The boy, Harry, she loved him and should have him. And Leonardson's sardonic humour was tickled by the notion of including her husband—the present possessor of his future wife!—in his party. It should be a pleasant evening. Only he would not show them the house. He would take her over it alone one day and point out its advantages for a woman.

It must be a short dinner followed by a theatre, so that no constraint might appear. He rang the bell and gave his final instructions.

CHAPTER XIII

The inaugural dinner at Howard Leonardson's house passed off well. Everything was done with the utmost magnificence. The host was a model of urbanity, Charles D'Enville showed himself at his gayest and most debonair, and his wife was excited and interested by the beauty and grandeur of her surroundings. Consequently she looked and talked her best. Harry was impressed—as any boy would have been—and he had partially overcome his dislike of the “Rajah”—his nickname for Leonardson.

He was up for his leave from Eton towards the end of the Easter half and prepared to enjoy himself. They went on afterwards to the play—a light comedy showing the foibles of the fashionable world in a pleasantly satirical manner. Then, finally, after supper, Leonardson left them, and father, mother and son drove back to the flat together.

A thought that this was probably the last occasion of the sort came to Charles D'Enville as he let himself in and held the door for the others. It is seldom a man grows so hardened or callous that the knowledge of a rupture of long-established habit, a change of environment, a departure for any considerable period from accustomed associations, fails to affect

him with a sensation of indefinite sadness, of vain regret. The feeling passes, but it is poignant while it lasts.

"We have chipped one or two fragments off the bright side of life in this small box of ours, Maie, in our time," he said.

She put her arm round Harry's shoulder.

"It hasn't been much of a home for you, old boy, I am afraid," she spoke in a loving tone.

"It's a ripping little place mother," the boy replied. "I agree with father;" he took the latter's arm. "We rub along," he declared.

The two parents exchanged a glance. For a minute Charles D'Enville almost regretted his bargain. He was reminded of the days when he believed in the world. He soon recovered, however.

"It is a trifle small after our friend's new abode."

Mrs. D'Enville's eyes shone. "He must be as rich as Cræsus. I had no idea when he first came here that he was more than an ordinary millionaire."

"It was pretty fan for a Rajah," Harry asserted.

"How would you like to have the spending of his income, sonny?" inquired his mother.

"By Jove! it would be all right." He looked at her and noticed she appeared excited.

"Why, father, your better half is regretting she can't have a shot for him herself," he winked solemnly at her.

"You foolish boy," she murmured. "Come, we had better all go to bed."

The next morning Mrs. D'Enville, moved by the whim of the moment, escorted her son to church. They lunched with some friends, and then, as it chanced to be fine and warm, Harry insisted on taking her to the Zoo—for which he had been given

two tickets. When alone together they were almost like brother and sister. She forgot all her worries for the moment and entered thoroughly into the spirit of the thing. She chaffed him mercilessly on his fancy for such an infantile pastime but she enjoyed it as much as he did. Harry was keenly interested in natural history, he always had a taste for it, and he roamed round the gardens in great content for some time.

"How long does the performance take?" inquired Mrs. D'Enville presently.

"Performance?"

"It is a compliment to call it that—funeral procession."

"Don't display your ignorance," he retorted, "the animals are alive."

"You are surely joking?" she asked with assumed gravity. "I am certain they expired ages ago from boredom and are all stuffed. If they haven't they ought to have. I should, and shall if you keep me here much longer."

"What, become stuffed?" he felt her arm, "it doesn't seem like sawdust yet."

His mother laughed. "It really is not uninteresting. Look at those poor birds in that great cage. They can fly round and round and perch on real trees and swim in real water—but they are prisoners all the same."

"I know," said Harry gravely, "when one thinks of that I always want to open the doors and let them out."

"They would only die of starvation or be shot."

"Yes, I suppose so, but the shame is to bring them from their homes."

"They give pleasure to a lot of people, and I

believe they come to prefer having everything done for them. At any rate they are safe from hawks and vultures."

"It is a poor way of existing. If I thought that I wouldn't mind, but they must simply long to really spread their wings and fly again—to be free."

"You are young, my infant." The speaker sighed. "When you grow up a bit more you will begin to see there are worse things in the world than a quiet haven where you are well looked after and are shut off from all danger, even if the same bars limit your range."

"Don't be so beastly pessimistic," said Harry, seizing her arm and leading her off. "Come on, we will go and see the lions fed. It is just time. If that doesn't buck you up we shall have to visit the monkey-house."

"If you dare," his mother laughed.

"Stale as an election-egg—try another."

A crowd thronged the lion-house. People will always go to see an exhibition of naked savagery. There is a potent attraction in the sight of a great caged beast purring and gloating over a piece of raw meat—then tearing it fiercely as he holds it between his paws.

"Hullo, here's the Rajah," exclaimed Harry, pausing before a cage where a splendid Bengal tiger paced impatiently to and fro, awaiting his meal. The steel muscles rippled under the smooth skin, and he gave vent to a short growl of annoyance as he reached the extent of his cage each time and turned with a quick jerk which indicated how his fierce spirit chafed at the restraint.

The keeper arrived and threw in the animal's

portion. With a smooth pounce he seized it, and, like a great cat, caressed it with his paws for a while, purring.

"Horrible creature!" said Mrs. D'Enville with a shudder, "suppose he got loose?"

"Don't you see the likeness?" persisted Harry.

She remembered her talks with Connie Mulford. They had compared Leonardson to a tiger more than once. Teeth and claws! At this moment the animal began its meal, gnawing savagely at the raw flesh, and she saw its sharp white teeth. Yes, it did recall Leonardson somehow. The comparison was not inapt.

"There is a resemblance;" she smiled with an effort. "How pleased he would be."

"I don't see why not. A tiger is the strongest beast of the lot, for it's size, and can take on any of the others. I think it's rather a compliment."

"I shall be quite nervous of him in future," she said ironically.

"I'll look after you," he returned. "Now we'll go and watch the penguins catch small fish in a glass tank."

"You are very blood-thirsty to-day."

"I did not make them. Nature ordains that the strong shall prey upon the weak," he declared, affecting an air of pomposity.

"It is no joking matter," she answered, "the weak have a remarkably poor time of it, I think."

"All the better for the strong."

"Yes, but all the worse for the weak. There ought to be some way of averaging things out."

"There is—civilization. I have not wasted my time at Eton, you see."

"I think civilization only replaces the strong by

the clever, so there is not much difference in the end."

"The 'Rajah' is a bit of both. Let's change the subject. I am getting bored." Harry yawned to emphasise his words.

"You began it," she said.

"How like a woman!" he returned, lifting his eyes to the sky.

They watched the penguin catch minnows in the tank, using his wings—or their remains—to "fly" through the water, as his primeval ancestors doubtless flew through the air. He caught them unerringly and gulped them down greedily.

"Poor little fish—they haven't had much fun out of life," Mrs. D'Enville remarked.

"You shouldn't look at the dark side of things in this way. It is a sign of old age," declared Harry; "think what fun it is for the other fellow and the audience."

They went away after this, back to the flat, and, presently, on to dine with the Mulfords, who were in town for a week. Charles D'Enville had left early in the morning for the country, and would not return till the next day, so they had the flat to themselves for the night. Before going to bed Mrs. D'Enville had a long talk with Harry over his affairs. It was now considered settled that he should go into the Guards. His Sandhurst exam. would take place shortly, before the end of the half, and, provided he passed, he would leave Eton after the summer. His mother spoke of returning to Mitchet when the present tenants gave up at the end of the year. They would certainly be able to afford it—judging from her husband's sanguine expectations. The flat would be kept on, and,

since Harry would be a good deal in London, he would need it. But his mother hoped that Mitchet was to be the home he had never yet had.

She could even see herself settling down into a country dame, with garden-parties in the summer and shooting-parties in the autumn. Lately, she seemed to weary of nothing but amusement. It was all very well for a change. Somehow this quiet day with Harry alone had given her more pleasure than anything she had done for a long time. Perhaps there was a vein of domesticity developing late in her.

"I shall be abroad till after Easter, Harry," she said, "so I shan't see you till you are back at Iton. It is a long time—shall you recognise me again?"

"If I look carefully perhaps I may. But Hubert Laiking's father has got a 'pro' going down to Arton to coach him next holidays and I can go there and practise."

"Is it hunting or motor-cars? Excuse my ignorance," she interrupted, knitting her brows in pretended perplexity.

"What are you driving at, you humbug?" he retorted; "you know perfectly well it's cricket."

"My mistake."

"I should think so. I shall be at Stoke D'Enville all the time, since I don't intend doing any 'cure' this year."

"Is it wise, considering your gout and other infirmities?" she chaffed.

"I will risk it. Are you going to see anything of the 'Rajah'?"

"I may go for a week with Connie Mulford on his yacht round the Mediterranean later on."

"Mind he doesn't eat you," concluded Harry,

"remember the tiger." He said good-night and left her.

She could not sleep again that night. The same sense of impending trouble took hold of her. Why did people compare Leonardson to a tiger and warn her of his teeth? The man was getting on her nerves. A picture rose before her mind of their dinner the previous night in his gorgeous new house, and, side by side with it, the tiger in his cage at the Zoo, devouring his meal. But the cage seemed to confine her in some way. She thought of all the money he had paid her—earned, no doubt, but somehow—still, Charles knew. She switched on a light and read for an hour. The distraction calmed her, and afterwards she slept quietly. After all, she had just enjoyed a day with her son, happily, which was worth a month of excitement. But her provisions were not without foundation, and the heavy clouds were closing down over her life.

Harry returned to Eton the next morning, and in the evening she dined out with some friends, going on to a theatre. When she got home her husband had already come in.

"Hullo," she observed, "this is an unexpected pleasure. You are early, *mon mari*."

"Yes—I want to speak to you."

"Wait while I put down my cloak, and I will be delighted."

The tiny boudoir was the only room with a fire, and they sat there together, as we have seen them before.

Charles D'Enville cleared his throat once or twice. He did not quite perceive the correct prelude to his forthcoming statement.

"Well, what is it?" she queried languidly, leaning back with her hands behind her head.

"You know, Maie, there really is very little of the married couple about us nowadays," he commented eventually.

"It satisfies the conventions," she yawned sleepily.

"And Harry is practically a man."

"Dear fellow."

"Do you see any insuperable objection to a separation?"

She unclasped her hands and leaned forward.

"What do you mean?" her voice came tensely.

"I endeavoured to be explicit."

"I thought it was understood there should be no publicity—for Harry's sake."

He waved a hand. "That was before he grew up."

"I fail to see the argument."

He got up and assumed his favourite attitude, with his back to the fire, straightening his spine.

"The fact of the matter is that I am about fed up."

"What is it you want?"

"Is there not some accepted course to be followed under such circumstances as these?" he went on with a polite smile.

"Possibly—but what is it?" Her voice sounded strained. The old feeling gripped her again.

"It is all very well—I'm a young man—comparatively speaking. I am well off, and shall shortly be extremely rich. Taking all things into consideration I am not inclined to continue as I am."

"Well?"

"To descend to plain facts—I desire to be free again."

"My good Charles—you have been drinking too much old port."

He bowed gracefully. "My dear, you wrong me, I assure you. I am absolutely sober."

"Then——"

"If you permit me, I shall be happy to make you acquainted with the exact details of my meaning."

"I must confess you seem to be in your normal senses."

"Thank you, my dear. Since I do not desire to inconvenience you more than can be avoided——"

"You are never purposely disagreeable, unless your liver is upset. I will say that for you."

"Be that as it may," he resumed dispassionately, "I would venture to suggest that we henceforth allow our paths to diverge."

"Is that all?"

"Far be it from me to presume to interfere with your own arrangements, my dear Maie, but I would respectfully point out that you are still at an age when I have no doubt it would be merely a matter of choosing——" He paused.

"Choosing?" she almost gasped. So this was at the bottom of his rigmarole?

"A—er—husband," he added urbanely. He turned and lit a cigarette. "You don't mind my smoking in here, I know."

She laughed somewhat shrilly. "Go on," she said.

"Whereas in a few years' time, say fifteen or so, it will be another kettle of fish—excuse the slang."

"Are you proposing to divorce me? If so——"

He raised a hand in shocked protest.

"How can you even hint at such a thing?"

She sighed wearily. Why must he meander on

A Society Mother

in any way? Surely if he was serious he might catch the point and get it over. It was like having a rope drawn out by slow jerks instead of in one good hard tug. Her brain felt quite fuddled.

"Perhaps you will explain."

"With pleasure. I merely request you to be good enough to present a petition for divorce on the usual grounds."

"Are you serious?"

"Perfectly."

"But ——"

"There will be no difficulty, of course. I shall enter no defence. In some nine months or so we shall both be free to begin life again, as it were."

She rose hastily to her feet.

"Harry," she cried, "the boy!"

"Naturally you will obtain the custody of the child." He watched the smoke of his cigarette curling upwards with a half-smile on his face.

"Have you had this idea in your mind for long?"

"Not very," he allowed.

"Is it your own? Why have you changed? You know we agreed there should be no open scandal."

"I did not foresee this remarkable improvement in my financial status."

"And suppose I decline to be a party to this?"

"Tut," he said, "why waste time?"

"Waste time?"

"I shall be reluctantly compelled to bring the action myself if you are unkind enough to refuse."

"You!"

"Citing a certain gentleman, whose money you have received, as co-respondent."

She answered with intense scorn in her voice:

A Society Mother

"You could not bring an action. You are notorious."

"It would make an awful to-do," he assented, closing his eyes as he suppressed a yawn. "Think of the headlines!"

"You would *never* succeed."

"Who knows? The law is terribly severe on you ladies."

"You are mad, Charles."

"Very possibly--most of us are, in some way. But perhaps you perceive how infinitely preferable it would be for you to move in this affair."

"Is the disgrace nothing to you?"

He shrugged his shoulders and sank languidly into a chair.

"Take a little time to consider it;" he imitated his mentor and master.

"Think of Harry, then."

"I have not mentioned that I will settle fifty thousand pounds on you and him when the decree is made absolute." This was one of Leonardson's instructions, for which he had agreed to find the money.

"Otherwise," he continued, "I shall do nothing of the kind."

Mrs. D'Enville let her head fall into her hands, and sat without speaking for some minutes. Her husband smoked quietly, looked at his watch, examined the toe of his pump with some attention, and generally waited with exemplary patience.

At length she sighed and drew herself up.

"What will happen to me? That is immaterial, no doubt."

"Not at all," he declared. "I have delicately indicated one course. I don't see personally," he

stopped to half rise and knock the ash of his cigarette into the grate, "why you should not secure our millionaire friend—if you are clever. He is certainly attracted, as, no doubt, you are well aware."

"Great heavens, Charles, you are not human!"

"You are too kind, really. I assure you I feel much as usual."

"But the disgrace?" she repeated, almost fatuously.

"It is not the first divorce in the family."

"But Henry's wife ran away. He behaved splendidly."

"You will have a similar opportunity. Need we prolong this discussion indefinitely?"

She struggled to concentrate her mind on the facts. Did this really mean the break-up of her home—such as it was? Whatever her life had been, there was the solid bottom of conventional respectability. So long as she bore her husband's name the world could say nothing to hurt. She never contemplated an upheaval—there was no reason to do so. If one thing had appeared surer than another it was that she would control the situation as between herself and Charles. He had nothing against her, and she could divorce him if she chose. Now he wanted her to. Why?—because he would soon be rich. She did not desire his money, but was she ready to face the world alone? What did Charles mean by this reference to Leonardson? She knew the man admired her—of late she wondered what the end was to be. What sort of position would be hers if she did consent to bring this action?

Another consideration occurred to her. Had

Charles no claim to his liberty if he wanted it? Was it fair to expect him to share his altered prospects with her as though they were on good terms?

Fair, perhaps-- but possible? No, if he really wished it, she would consent—except for Harry. But how would Harry benefit if she refused? Suppose Charles was in earnest about his threat of taking proceedings himself? She would be forced to defend herself. The mud would fly—much necessarily would stick. Whatever the issue, people would blame her—they always do. It cannot be the man's fault. Those who were acquainted with all the facts might be just and let her off with a few condescending words of reproof at the mistake of going into court. Her friends—the numerous body of gay people she associated with—how delighted with a fresh topic! The vast majority, picking up a word here and there, would never trouble to inquire whether their information was accurate, and *she* would be the one to suffer. People always talked of these things in a casual way, laying the blame equally on the innocent and the guilty. "Six of one and half a dozen of the other, you know, dear." "There is always more in these cases than comes out." "Probably a put-up job all round." She could hear the remarks already. And they would be true. It *would* be a "put-up" job. It came home to her then that those who play with fire all their lives are bound to be burned in the long run. It is amusing and interesting to watch others, one's friends for instance, caught in a sudden tongue of flame—to criticize their wriggings and prophesy the result.

But to go through it one's self! She shuddered

162 A Society Mother

involuntarily. Her thoughts reverted to Harry. She could not picture how he would take it. The chief, the only thing in the world she really cared for unselfishly, and she had determined he should be saved, if she could contrive it in any way, from open disgrace. Possibly this resolve was responsible above everything else for the fact that, though her path had wound perilously near the abyss, yet always she had kept her footing.

"Well?" drawled her husband, impatience beginning to sharpen his tone.

She raised her eyes to his face with a marvellously soft glow in them. Her mouth was quite gentle, and the hardness of expression gone for the moment, it was almost wistful.

"I want to save Harry from such a stigma. I would do anything, Charles, rather than let him be branded with this reproach."

But her husband was growing bored. He had a letter to write, and his mind was made up, so that sentiment could not possibly be allowed to interfere. Besides——

"Pooh!" he remarked airily. "Let us be practical. Harry is a man now. No one will think the worse of him. I am willing to take the whole thing on my shoulders—I really don't see what you have got to complain of."

She lay back in her chair, thinking again.

"I cannot do it—I cannot," she murmured, half to herself.

"Any new idea is apt to be a little startling at first. You will rapidly accustom yourself to it. Use is a wonderful digestive."

"But you promised Harry should never be disgraced."

"I will guarantee that you approve of ~~my~~ efforts on his behalf before a year is past."

"What will you gain?"

"My freedom—and other things."

"On your word of honour," she laughed as she realised her words—"I suppose you regard the letter, if not the spirit of the tag—do you want me to do this for your own sake?"

"To some extent. Hang it, Maie, be sensible. I have never upset you more than I could help. It is hardly playing the game for you to drive me to make trouble."

"You mean to?"

"Certainly I do, if you decline my most reasonable request."

"I will tell you to-morrow. My brain is tired, I cannot reason to-night."

"Very good. I shall have the pleasure of waiting upon you after breakfast."

And so they parted.

CHAPTER XIV

It need only be recorded that Mrs. D'Enville's opposition to the divorce was overcome. There was much to be done, various points to be thrashed out. The financial details to be agreed upon, and the other conditions to be arranged. The family solicitor had to be instructed, and set in motion the machinery of the law. Then, having done his part, Charles D'Enville went abroad for a time. A week or so after his going, Howard Leonardson lunched at the flat with the lady he designed to marry.

He was in high fettle with life. In accordance with his calculations, the great enterprises in which he was concerned all over the world were working up to a point at which he could leave their control largely to others. This was allowed for in his scheme of the future, since he must have time to develop his plan in the new worlds he meant to conquer.

Meanwhile the matter which alone touched his heart promised better than any.

His tool had accomplished his task skilfully and with judgment. If he knew aught of the woman he was with, she would come not only willingly, but gladly, to him when the time was ripe.

He could give her everything she wanted—pro-

tection from the world, wealth beyond dreams, and presently, a position he intended to be unique. He appreciated the difficulty she would be in—together, no woman could withstand such a siege as he could lay. There was no one else who stood in his way, he was satisfied of that. Those men she knew intimately were nothing more than friends, as Charles D'Enville had been able to assure him, and he had used his own peculiar methods to confirm the information. Many things can be learned by aid of a cheque-book and a knowledge how to use it.

At every point he could bring his batteries into play. Her heart—for not only would her son's future be secured beyond anything she imagined, but he did not lack confidence with regard to his power to gain more than her regard. Her love of luxury, of beautiful things, could be indulged to the utmost. The wildest extravagance would be a trifle; every whim, no matter how costly, need only be expressed to be gratified. In the time to come money would be as dross. With his income as colossal and certain as the revenues of a state, he would, in the intervals of his new career, indulge those innate tastes for self-indulgence which were part of his being and had hitherto been sternly kept in subjection. In such extravagant fields he permitted his mind to wander as he watched his hostess with the lust of desire in his gaze.

They discussed his progress, his arrangements for the season, the sensation already created by his now notorious proceedings. His London house, his yacht, and his recent purchase of Balrig. This last had caused a larger wave of public curiosity than all. People were asking about this Cræsus

who had arisen among them. "A well-known City financier"—true, but even well-known City financiers did not buy whole counties off-hand.

He talked wittily enough of it all. How he was besieged by reporters, how society was bestirring itself already. The cordiality of his colleagues, the increasing affability of the great men he came in contact with.

That he should, even to some extent, realise the hollowness of it impressed her as much as anything. He would be a power in any sphere, as she always believed. It was impossible not to feel flattered by his attentions. She thought of her own and Charles's original scheme to attract and hold this man—and she smiled. It called up a vision of mice endeavouring to drive a team of cats. Cats—there was the "tiger" simile again. It was always coming to her mind now, and it was unpleasing.

"You look worried," he remarked suddenly, in the middle of a conversation on her plans for the summer. "I have seen it ever since I arrived."

Worried! no wonder, she thought, with this case hanging over her—and she had to tell Harry. She dreaded this, and had not yet summoned the courage to see him.

"I am—my thoughts are scarcely stimulating, just now."

He half-shut his eyes and dug his fingers into the palm of his hand. A little while more and he need not hold back. The moment, however, was not yet.

"I am sorry—perhaps I——?" he paused suggestively.

"Thank you, but there is nothing to be done."

"A friend can often help, at any rate it is something—is it not—to share trouble?"

She passed her hand across her forehead with a gesture of utter weariness. A sleepless night and a mind ill at ease do not conduce to physical well-being, however excellent they may be as scourges for the spirit.

"I do not know why you should not be told. It will be public property soon enough." She wondered, a little dully, what the effect of the communication would be. Really, since she would in all probability be free in a few months, she must look ahead. Suppose Leonardson wished to marry her? She remembered her husband's light words, and it was borne in upon her that such an opportunity was too good to be missed. She had her own niche to scoop out in the hard granite of life's surface. She stood alone in the world—she was fighting for her own hand and Harry's. "You will derive a new interest from your morning paper shortly," she went on. "Every woman and most men will open their halfpenny newsmonger with bated breath, turning with one accord to the latest thing in fashionable drama—and hoping for spicy details."

His face remained sympathetically solemn. Not a muscle moved. He was anxious to see how she took it.

"I am bringing an action against my devoted husband for deliverance from his society and a return to my original surname. I see so much of him that it is fully justified," she concluded, with bitter sarcasm.

"You are determined to do this? What does it mean?"

"Oh, as I said, you will soon know a good deal

more about it than I do. All the facts—with the colour provided by the agile imaginations of the reporters thrown in."

Leonardson was puzzled. This bitterness, was it regret, or what? She certainly did not strike him as delighted at the idea of her release. Had he realised that her whole thought at that instant was for Harry, and the effect on him, he would have found the reason more obvious. Personally, it made no difference whether she was Charles D'Enville's wife or not. The only way it affected her was the loss of the protection afforded by his name, and that was not a serious problem for the moment.

"What can I say? This is a great blow to me. My best friends, the people I am most interested in. Is it impossible to think of a—reconciliation?"

"It would be a futile occupation, I am afraid."

"And you say the case will soon be commenced?"

"The curiosity of our friends will be sadly disappointed, too. It will only last quite a short time. There is no defence."

Leonardson got up. "No doubt you will prefer not to be bothered too much just now. You have my sincerest sympathy, and you can always send for me if you want help or advice."

"Thanks, you are kind. I shall value your friendship." She spoke half absently, her mind occupied once more with her son.

"Afterwards," he said, "I shall see you again. Why did you not tell me before?"

"I have not seen you the last week. As it is, you are the first outsider to know."

"I am honoured." He held out his hand and bowed slightly as he pressed hers. A smile parted

his lips, and she involuntarily shivered. Why did he exercise this peculiar kind of mesmeric effect on her?

"Afterwards," he repeated with an emphasis which was unmistakable, and he looked full into her eyes.

A moment later he drew the door to behind him. She rang the bell for the man to let him out, then stepped to the window, which she unlatched. Down below waited an electric brougham with two impassive figures in black—the driver and a footman. Leaning out, she saw him emerge and cross the pavement. He did not turn his head, but entered the vehicle briskly. The man closed the door, climbed into his place, and in a few seconds they passed out of sight. Smooth, noiseless, swift and black, the carriage reminded her, from above, of a great beetle crawling on a path—or, rather, of Leonardson himself. "Tiger and beetle"—not altogether attractive personalities, she told herself.

She felt curiously elated. Surely his meaning was clear enough? She could, if she chose, marry him. She knew men; there was not much chance of her making a mistake here. She needed no instructing as to the advantages of such a match. Riches might be coming to Charles D'Enville, *she* would—— She sighed. Perhaps these rosy visions were a little premature; besides, Leonardson was an indispensable accompaniment to her dream of gold—Leonardson, ah!

The next day Harry came out of his house at Eton in a well-contented frame of mind. "Trials" were over, and he felt he had done well—not that

it mattered much, as he was certain to have qualified in the Sandhurst exam. a few weeks before—still, it is always a good thing to get the full enjoyment out of an easy conscience. He was greatly looking forward to the holidays at Stoke D'Enville and the cricket coaching which he hoped would add the desired finish to his style and strengthen his chance of getting into the Eleven next half. There is always a feeling of satisfaction in reaching the end of a "half," and everyone is in good spirits at the prospect of relaxation from discipline for a time.

As he rounded the corner out of the yard he ran into his mother's arms.

"Hullo," he observed genially, "this is an unexpected pleasure. You are only just in time, young woman; you would not have found me here this time to-morrow."

"I know, dear," she said. "I came down by train and walked from the station. I want to talk to you."

Her tone was most uncommonly serious, he thought. What was up? He threw a glance at her, and fancied she looked pale and tired. As a matter of fact, she had walked up to delay the unavoidable explanation to the last moment. Childishly weak, no doubt, but she hated the task which lay before her. Yet she would not have anyone else inform him.

"Come on in. I am disengaged for an hour or two just now." He pinched her ear—nobody being about—took her arm, and led her back upstairs to his room. Here he provided her with an arm-chair, and sat himself on the edge of the table.

"Are you heavily in debt?" he began, trying to

keep up the light banter of their usual intercourse.

Mrs. D'Enville got up and went to the mantel-piece. Here her eyes fell upon photographs of herself and one of Charles—taken some years ago. These did not help her. However, she made a plunge.

"I am afraid things are in a mess, old boy."

"What's the mischief?" His voice grew serious as he marked the earnestness in hers.

"More than money, Harry." Moving up to him, she put her arm round his neck and kissed him on the forehead.

"You must be prepared for rather a shock, I am afraid;" her lip quivered. Leonardson would have been hard put to it to recognise her by her expression.

Harry placed his hand round her waist.

"Go ahead," he remarked.

"You have never had much of a home;" she stroked his hair. "What little there has been is to be—broken up."

Harry jumped to his feet, and stared at her in amazement.

"What, mother!" She leant against the table, but spoke firmly.

"It is true. Your father and I are going to be—divorced."

The boy opened his mouth and shut it again without speaking. Then he clenched his fists and drew himself up. The action reminded her of Charles—only Harry's was real, and her husband's always seemed an affectation.

"Divorced!" he repeated at last. "That sounds a bit thick." He walked to the window and stood gazing out. Presently he turned round.

"I don't quite understand. Do you mean a big case, and all that?"

"Yes."

"Like Uncle Henry's?"

"Yes."

"I suppose it's all settled?" He did not wait for an answer, but went on, speaking quickly: "It's rather a disgrace, I believe, or so Uncle Henry seems to imagine. Hang it all, mother, can't it be stopped?"

She sat down on a sort of ottoman against the wall.

"I am afraid not. The case will be coming on very soon. There is nothing to be done."

He laughed. "Seems to run in the family. What effect will it have?"

"Oh, as if we had not been married, I suppose."

"Er—don't you think I might have been consulted?" His indignation broke out.

"Don't look at me like that, Harry," she pleaded wistfully; "it is not my doing."

"You could have told me about it." His tone was gravely reproachful.

"I wanted to spare you if I could, my boy," she faltered.

"I am not a child," he declared, with great bitterness.

She smiled ruefully. Poor boy! no wonder he felt it. It had never occurred to her to ask his opinion, yet now he seemed in some way to be taking charge of the situation. He noticed the smile and flushed.

"It appears to me that I am concerned to some small extent." He crossed to her side.

"My darling," she replied, taking his hand and

raising her eyes to his face, "I am nearly distracted with it. *You* mustn't blame me."

Harry drew his hand away gently and said,

"I should like to hear all the facts."

His mother could almost have smiled again, but she repressed the inclination. It would have been a melancholy effort if she had indulged it.

"I was not prepared for such a severe son," she said, with an attempt at lightness.

"Of course you are the plaintiff?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"And is there a—defence?"

"No."

"Who is the—er—third party?"

"Oh, Harry, what is the good of going into all this? The thing is done."

"I fail to see how you are compelled to bring the case. You need not—"

"It is impossible to explain everything. Can't you believe me when I say it is necessary?"

He returned to the window and stared moodily out again. Then he dug his hands into his pockets and started to pace the room.

"I must see him," he announced.

"He is abroad, dear. Besides, it can do no good."

"I should prefer to judge for myself," he said coldly, every word hitting her like a blow in the face. "However, I can wait till he returns. Is this father's wish—this divorce, then?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"You are sure?"

"Harry!"

"This is no joking matter. It is a jolly disgraceful thing. I must see my way clear." His youth-

ful, fresh appearance and air contrasted strangely, absurdly, with the determined voice and the set face.

Mrs. D'Enville got up again, half-laughing, half-crying. She felt on the verge of hysterics. The whole thing was so utterly ludicrous, and yet it cut her to the heart.

"Don't turn against me——" Her voice broke and caught.

Harry was instantly conquered. He kissed her tenderly, and made her sit down, then knelt by her chair.

"Poor old thing!" he remarked, "I suppose it is pretty bad for you, too."

When she left to return to London she had made her peace with the boy. He was very kind and gentle, but, on the other hand, he would not talk about the case any more. Just before she went she hugged him close to her.

"I shall always have you, Harry; you will never leave me?"

"All right," he answered, uncomfortably, with the natural objection of his kind to such demonstrations, "we will always stick together."

"You are satisfied?"

"I don't suppose it's your fault, anyhow," he admitted. In his own mind he determined to prevent the thing at all costs if he could. Only he had not the foggiest notion how to set about it. Clearly, it was no use upsetting his mother any more. He resented the whole affair deeply. It was all very well to joke about other fellows whose people had these episodes. He realised for himself what it was now. The fact of his uncle having shut himself up like a hermit because his wife ran away,

had brought a serious side of such cases home to him in a way that nothing else could have. "Don't worry too much," he went on, "it never does any good. We will have an awful good time together yet."

She smiled weakly, her eyes glistening. "Believe me, it is for the best. I cannot refuse to do it—besides, I shall be glad in some ways. I want to rest, I am tired."

"I'll come up to Windsor with you," he said. "By the way, if you divorced father, you would be free to marry again. Should you?"

She gasped. Their positions appeared to be reversed. He was catechising her again.

"Should you object, Mr. D'Enville?" she asked, with a gleam of merriment breaking through the clouds.

He kissed her. "You require looking after. I shall reserve my approval. Good heavens!" he added, "don't let's joke about it."

He saw her off at the station, and stood smiling as she waved to him from the carriage window, bending out to catch the last glimpse of him as the train rounded the curve.

Once his mother was out of sight Harry's face changed. He knitted his brows and thought hard as he slowly retraced his steps down the steep incline by the castle and through the town of Eton. He went into one of the houses at the corner of Keat's Lane, and made his way up to Hubert Larking's room. The occupier was at home.

"Hullo, what's up?" he inquired, noticing Harry's expression.

The latter sat down heavily. "The very deuce," he replied. "You won't say anything, I know."

I wouldn't tell another soul, not even K.," he continued, "but I am in an awful mess."

"What's the row?"

"My people are going to be divorced—at least my mother has been down to tell me."

Larking looked grave. "Really?" he observed, somewhat at a loss.

"Yes, I must get it out, and I know you are safe enough. I want to prevent it if I can."

"How?"

"That's just what I don't know." He gazed absent-mindedly at a photograph on the wall, only conscious of his mother's appealing face—but resolved to stop the thing somehow.

His friend watched him in silence for a while. Then he said:

"You are going to your uncle's to-morrow, I suppose?"

"Yes, why?"

"I should ask him about it. I don't know him very well," added Hubert, "but it seems to me he's the right person, and he's a good sort."

Harry pondered. "I believe you are right. I *will* ask him."

The other got up. "Come and have a game of racquets," he said. "I don't suppose anyone is playing to-day. There is just time before lock-up."

"Right you are," returned Harry, "I will go and change. Look out—I shall give you an awful smashing."

"All right," said Hubert, smiling. "It will do you good."

CHAPTER XV

The great dining-room at Stoke D'Enville was scarcely lit up by the four small lamps on the table. This latter was at the side towards the huge fireplace. There were no other lights. The further side and the ends were shrouded in gloom, while the shaded rays of the lamps barely reached the faces of the portraits on the wall nearest to them. A wood fire burnt dully in the open hearth. The servants had just withdrawn silently, leaving Harry and his uncle alone. The top of the table was bare, a magnificent piece of polished mahogany, and a few decanters of old cut-glass, in solid silver stands, with glasses to match, were reflected in the surface as in a mirror. They appeared almost lost on the shining expanse of wood.

Harry chose this time to unburden his heart on the subject of the divorce. The very word weighed on him oppressively. The indefiniteness of it, the vague idea he had of the exact meaning, the actual facts connected with it, rendered his uneasiness the more acute. He was only a boy, and a lonely one, too, at the moment. There fell a short silence. Lord D'Enville had been unusually genial, he was glad to have the boy back—he had missed him.

“Have you heard anything from father?” began Harry.

"No," his uncle replied, a little sharply.

The boy pushed back his chair. Lord D'Enville watched him, slightly surprised. He was leaning back easily himself, with his finger and thumb on the stem of his port glass. At night, dressed for dinner, the suggestion of uncouthness disappeared. His beard was brushed and his hair tidy. He looked a personage, and in spite of an evident disregard of appearances, he fitted in with his surroundings.

"Mother came down to Eton yesterday—she was very much upset."

"Yes?" interjected Lord D'Enville politely. He wondered what was coming, and withdrew a little further into the shell of habitual reserve, from which he had partially emerged to-night.

Harry controlled his voice with some difficulty. He had forced himself to keep up in front of his mother the day before—she was so patently distressed he had to affect an unconcern very far from his real feelings. He had gone through a baddish time, and now Lord D'Enville was such a very unknown quantity. He *must* have advice, though, and he found it easier than he had expected. His uncle's glance was kindly, if nothing more, and not unsympathetic.

"You said at Christmas you—you would be willing to help her if she got into trouble."

"Yes, my boy," to Harry's surprise the deep voice was singularly soft; "go on."

"There is to be a divorce case," he muttered, keeping his eyes instinctively averted.

A change came over the listener's countenance, like a sudden squall over the surface of a deep lake. This touched him very nearly. It brought

back his own trouble. Very quickly he regained his self-control, and spoke with a cynical accent.

"Indeed! This is certainly news to me."

"She is to divorce father. I—I," the boy's voice broke a little, "I am afraid it is—I want to stop it if I can."

"You want to stop it?"

"Yes," said Harry with decision. "It is a disgrace to the family."

"You are right," replied his uncle quietly, "I am glad to know you think so. Some people hold a different opinion."

"Mother feels it very much—but she says it is unavoidable."

"What do you propose to do?"

He put the question gravely, with no hint of irony. The boy pleased him. He noted the wide open eye, burning with indignation, the quivering nostril—sign of the sensitive, highly-strung nature, and his young mouth, set in a firm line. Inwardly his own proud spirit answered to the call, but he had learnt his lesson, and a sardonic appreciation of the humorous side of the case tempered his emotion. Poor Harry! he had all to learn, and the pill of experience is bitter to the palate. What could he do—a child?

"I did not tell mother—she would not have been able to stand much, she was really half distracted—I let her think I agreed."

"Quite right. Go on, I am listening."

"She says father wishes her to do this."

"Ah!" said the other suddenly, with a new hardness in his tone.

"I decided the best thing would be to ask your opinion. You are head of the family, and—I believe you won't mind," he concluded.

"I shall be glad to be of assistance, if I can," Lord D'Enville said sincerely.

Harry was grateful—it was everything to be met in this grave, serious way, to be treated as a man. He began to feel more hopeful. If there was a remedy they would find it between them.

He turned his chair towards his uncle and spoke more easily.

"I thought, as mother said he wished it, there must be some sort of arrangement. Surely that would not be legal?"

His eye scanned his uncle's face anxiously. This was his great idea, which he had evolved in the long, sleepless night when he lay tossing, his young mind overburdened with this terrible strain. Harry was keenly sensitive, very alive to ridicule or contempt in any form. The thought that his own father and mother would be the parties to a divorce grated on his proud sensibility. It was incredible that *his* people were to be held up to the public derision by the newspapers. He refused to accept it—yet his mother seemed to consider it unavoidable.

The trouble came at a critical period in his life—he was on the threshold of manhood, and the effect upon him must be eventful one way or the other. At present his chief conception of the future lay in a vague determination to have a real good time. No sense of responsibility had yet entered his mental horizon. He would go into his regiment, have plenty of money, sport, games, amusement, dissipation—take his place, as a D'Enville should, in the world of London.

He knew plenty of fellows a few years older than himself who had already attained this distinction. They came down to Eton sometimes, and they

inspired him with a slightly envious admiration. As he imagined it, they hunted, they shot, they played polo, they graced all the great summer entertainments—race-meetings, balls, garden-parties. They patronised the stage in more ways than one—altogether they led a life he was becoming anxious to share.

And now he was suddenly brought up all standing by this. He resented it bitterly. It touched him on the quick. Lots of fellows, he thought, would make a joke of it, think it rather a fine thing. But he was a D'Enville. There was the family name. His uncle could not help his wife running away, but it had driven him from the world. Harry thoroughly approved of Lord D'Enville's behaviour; he understood it, and admired him for it. Now the same thing, or worse, had come to them.

"Do you want my real opinion, Harry?" asked the man who had passed through this fire—whose own proud nature had been wrung as through a dirty, foul mangle.

∴ "If you please, Uncle Henry."

"Well then, I do not see that you can do anything."

Harry stared in bewilderment. Did he hear aright?

✱ "But—but——" he stammered.

✱ "It does not seem to have occurred to you that your parents are the principals to this case."

∴ "But, of course——"

✱ "If they have both decided that this step is necessary, it is clearly a little difficult for outsiders—even their own children—to interfere. Presumably they have good reason for such an act. You say your mother is upset. You have not seen

your father. Write to him, if you like, and ascertain his opinion—put it to him from your point of view. But I honestly fail to see how you yourself can intervene."

Harry's face fell during this speech. He was woefully disappointed. Surely something could be done?

"If the divorce takes place I shall never be able to look anyone in the face," he said.

"On the contrary, you must hold your head a little higher."

"You chucked everything." The boy brought out the words with a despairing accent, which showed he had not thought.

"It happened to be my wife," remarked Lord D'Enville quietly.

"I beg your pardon," Harry stammered, colouring.

"Your emotion is natural—even creditable," continued his uncle, dropping into his customary manner; "but, all the same, you would be in a capital position, if you were a few years older, to test the metal of your friends—only it is not an enlivening occupation."

"Can I do nothing?" cried Harry, the realisation of his helplessness coming upon him with fresh force.

"I do not even say that it would be advisable—if you could."

"But anything is better than dragging our name through the mud," declared the boy impulsively, "and father will be dishonoured——"

Lord D'Enville laughed aloud, mockingly. Then suddenly he stopped—regarding his nephew with a peculiar expression, half satirical, half pitiful.

"Write to him, anyway, Harry. As for your mother—well, we will discuss the matter again, when you have heard more about it." He got up, and seeing that he evidently wished to drop the discussion, Harry said no more.

Later in the evening he composed his letter. He set forth his young views as straightly as he could, writing of disgrace to the name and family, of his fervent hope his father and mother would not do this. It was expressed in words which must carry conviction of their genuineness. He begged for an opportunity to discuss matters before any definite step was taken—explaining that he was old enough to think now, imploring at least delay. For very pity it should be difficult for Charles D'Enville to ignore this pathetic cry from his son.

Then for some days Harry possessed his soul in what patience he could muster, anxiously awaiting the reply. He wrote to his mother, who had gone to stay with friends in Devonshire, informing her of his action, and stating that he would like to see her directly she returned to town. It was a rather severe epistle, and he could not find the heart to add the accustomed terms of endearment and the chaffing remarks which he always concluded with. The pathos of it was not lost upon her, and she guessed something of what he must be going through.

It was a miserable enough time for them both.

Then Charles D'Enville's letter arrived. Harry opened it with trembling fingers. He was in bed, and a footman had just called him.

"MY DEAR HARRY," he read, "I received your letter with some slight surprise—though with my usual pleasure at hearing from you. As you say, it

is regrettable that my relations with your mother should have become so strained. No—there is nothing to be done. It is too late to think of drawing back. I fear the bond has arrived at the breaking point, and will bear no more. We must bow to destiny with a good grace. I notice you appear to attach an exaggerated importance to the sentimental side of the affair. Believe me, my dear boy, the old adage '*Noblesse oblige*' will cover more than a divorce. While actually in progress, the lamentable publicity afforded to these affairs by a scandal-loving press is a little disagreeable, but in all other respects there is not the least necessity to take the matter so seriously. It is naturally a source of regret to me that our own intercourse will be perforce restricted by the altered conditions of our relationship. I must console myself with the reflection that, in any event, since you are now on the verge of manhood, our ways would have become gradually more and more divergent. At least I have the satisfaction of feeling that you will, financially, be in a better position than I ever anticipated. Should you at any time be in want of a friend, pray consider me at your service ; and trusting that our mutual regard may undergo no diminution, believe me,

“ Your affec. father,

“ CHARLES D'ENVILLE.”

He reached the end, and let the paper drop from his hand on to the floor. A sob, irrepressible and involuntary, rose in his throat. With an angry resentment at his weakness he flung the clothes on to one side and leapt out of bed. For the revulsion of feeling was intense, and the calm ignoring of the

outpourings of his heart hurt him, even as he recognised his father's characteristic callousness. It had never before been applied to him so directly, however, and the experience was not pleasant.

He showed the letter to his uncle after breakfast when they were alone. The latter read it impassively.

"Your father is seldom put out," he commented. "It is the advantage of cultivating a good, working philosophy of self. An extremely good case can be made out for such an attitude towards existence. It saves endless worry and inconvenience."

Harry jumped up from his chair.

"But it is preposterous," he said, "father must be mad. He doesn't mention the—the public dishonour——" He stalked to the window and glared gloomily out over the park.

"I do not often allude to your parents' relations," his uncle's voice sounded unwontedly serious, "but from an impersonal standpoint I am bound to confess that I think your mother would be well rid of my brother Charles."

Harry swung round.

"Well rid of him?" he demanded.

"Exactly. If they are both decided on this course, it is not for you or me to interfere—under the circumstances. They would not listen if we did. Your father is extremely obstinate, and the last thing he would appreciate would be an attempt to show him that he is in the wrong. What could you do? Make a fuss in court? You would gain nothing. You will not succeed in preventing the action being started. Consider on what terms your parents would be if the case came on and failed.

Your publicity and disgrace enhanced, if possible, and the last state of an ill-mated couple a great deal worse than the first."

Harry saw the drift of **this** speech, and recognised its truth. Lord D'Enville resumed :

"When the thing is settled I shall be glad to assist your mother in any way in my power—but, until then, I can do no good."

"I suppose you are right, Uncle Henry. You know best," the boy admitted reluctantly. "Here is a letter from mother I got yesterday. Will you read it?"

Mrs. D'Enville's answer to her son's epistle showed how keenly she desired to reconcile him to the inevitableness of the divorce. Her love for him was to be discerned in every sentence. There was no mistaking her longing to do what was best for Harry. But no other realisation of ethical principles was apparent. As far as the divorce went it was merely an incident in one's life, possibly objectionable, but otherwise to be got through like an attack of influenza. She evidently wanted to be with him, but she said that till the case was on she did not feel equal to moving from where she was, and she could not have him there. As a matter of fact, she had not the heart to face him till it was over.

The blow fell with no light weight on Harry, as he recognised he had to submit passively, but he learnt a lesson which was almost worth the price. Fortunately for the effect on his character, he only heard, at the time, his uncle's honourable, if sombre, opinions, and was away from worldly influences. The quiet sane counsel must work for good and tend to his ultimate benefit.

Hubert Larking said little, only expressing regret at the whole trouble.

Thanks to warm and genial spring weather, they were able to begin playing cricket earlier than most years, and Harry soon found all his time fully occupied. Lord D'Enville began to consult him on estate matters—with a view to keeping his thoughts from dwelling too much on the subject of the case—and he hunted occasionally with the hounds, if it could be called hunting in this thickly wooded Hertfordshire country, where the day was usually occupied in pottering from one covert to the next. Still, it kept his mind busy.

The cricket progressed excellently. He derived no inconsiderable satisfaction from letting off steam by an hour's vigorous smiting at the net. Rogers, the pro., expressed himself as distinctly sanguine about his prospects of representing the school next half, and he ardently wished to do so. At first he told his uncle he would not go back again—for the last eighteen months Lord D'Enville had looked after the boy's school affairs, an arrangement that suited Charles D'Enville excellently, since he was saved any trouble, the fees being paid through his solicitor—but his uncle would not hear of it. He considered that Harry's character would be improved and strengthened by having to face his companions under new conditions. He did not lack manner or confidence, or Lord D'Enville would have hesitated. As it was he would learn self-reliance as well. His uncle's own possibly over-cynical outlook saw no harm or objection to Harry becoming acquainted with the rough edge of life—the sooner the better now. It would teach him

independence, and give him an insight into the intrinsic worth of Vanity Fair.

In the midst of this upheaval of his small circle Harry found a further distraction in the affairs of the Larkings. Hubert, with the consent of his father, talked freely to him on the subject. It appeared that Mr. Larking was in a state of suspense as to the fortunes of his firm. They were engaged in a life-and-death struggle now in their business. Since Leonardson was known to be behind the competition it was realised how vital the contest was. However, thanks to the reputation of Larking and Co. and their long-established connection, it had been no easy task to cut the ground from under their feet.

It now appeared that the real object of the newcomers was to arrange eventually for the absorption of the Larking concern in the great house of Nathan and Co.—at least, Mr. Larking had received an intimation, very indirectly, to that effect. From a merely commercial standpoint there could be nothing against this—undoubtedly both sides would derive no slight advantage by working together. But Mr. Larking was a pig-headed Briton. His great pride and delight was to be independent of everybody—his own master—and he viewed the idea of sinking the individuality of his business in the vast ocean of Nathan's with whole-hearted disfavour. Also Leonardson himself—Mr. Larking entertained a wholesome respect for that gentleman's capacity—was no longer actively concerned in this side of his vast business.

He therefore by no means despaired of holding his own, and his partners were behind him in the resolve to resist to the last. He only hesitated for the sake

of his family, not able entirely to justify himself in running a risk of final defeat for the sake of an old-fashioned scruple. On the one side lay the certainty of continued and increasing prosperity, on the other a similar and even more satisfactory success—since it would be entirely their own—or a chance, the chance was by no means negligible, of bankruptcy.

The more he pondered over the situation the more obstinate grew Mr. Larking. He intensely disliked the idea of falling in with anybody's views under more or less compulsion. His was the spirit of the old merchant adventurers, and, though possibly foolish, undeniably deserving of respect. Had he been approached by the other firm in a friendly way, he might have been ready enough to fall in with their proposals; as it was, they had put his back up in their perfectly legitimate desire to be in a position to make advantageous terms.

It was in consequence of his anxiety that Mr. Larking had consulted Hubert in the matter, as his son, heir and successor in the business. The latter, being of an independent spirit also, fully concurred with his father's views, and was all for battle. The fact that Hubert thought sufficiently well of Harry's discretion to talk it over with him was rather a coincidence. Leonardson's personality seemed to be cropping up in all sorts of unexpected places along Harry's road.

Mr. Larking often attended the cricket practice when he was at home, and one day he remarked to Harry that if Lord D'Enville cared to come down he hoped he would, without any ceremony. Mr. Larking had shot a few times at Stoke D'Enville, and knew the owner to that extent, but on no

occasion had Lord D'Enville consented to enter another man's house since his retirement, save in the way of business. There had, it is almost needless to say, been many heartburnings among the fair sex at this unsociability, the cause being variously attributed to bad taste and "airs"—according to the social standing of the neglected. Mr. Larking gave the invitation purely as a matter of form, with no anticipation that he would be taken at his word.

Harry repeated it incidentally, and, to his amazement, a day or two later his uncle expressed his intention of accompanying him across the park to Arton.

He wanted to see what sort of a player Harry was developing into, and he liked both Hubert Larking and his father.

It chanced that afternoon that no one else was there when they arrived, except Hubert and Rogers. The former could hardly believe his eyes, and by no means did himself justice from nervousness at his unexpected audience. Then Harry went in, and, pleased by his uncle's interest, proceeded to perform in his best style. Rogers was enthusiastic, and the whole party were completely absorbed in their occupation.

Lord D'Enville stood behind the net, and watched with a pleasure he had not experienced for a long time. It brought back his boyhood to him. Presently, however, he sighed as he recalled his own keen enjoyment of life at Harry's age. He had been in the Eton Eleven in his time, and the contrast of his sanguine youth and the cynical disillusion of his middle age was suddenly brought home to him.

"Hullo, D'Enville, I am delighted to see you.

Let me introduce you to my wife," exclaimed a voice behind him.

The proceedings halted for a moment. Harry suppressed a chuckle, and Lord D'Enville turned with a gasp. Mr. Larking was smiling cordially at him with hand extended. By his side was Mrs. Larking, plump, elderly, and flustered. She was overcome with mingled pride and awe. Her acquaintance with the peerage was limited, and not intimate. That she should be the first woman in the neighbourhood to hold converse with Lord D'Enville since he retired from society caused her good-natured soul to swell with superiority. At the same time, she was doubtful how she ought to treat such an important person in view of his well-known aversion to her sex.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Lord D'Enville," she said, with almost gushing cordiality. "I thought you *never* went outside your park gates."

He shook hands with her gravely. "It has been my loss," he said.

The worthy lady gurgled with delight.

"Now you have broken down your rules, we shall hope to see something more of you."

"Tut, my dear," interposed her husband indulgently, "Lord D'Enville has only come to see the cricket. We must not bother him with invitations."

"Now, I am sure you don't mind my asking you, do you?" she demanded in a tone of great geniality.

Harry, overhearing this remark, was so put to it to resist an explosion of mirth that Hubert incontinently bowled him with a long hop. It tickled him immensely that his uncle should be caught like this, and he knew of old Mrs. Larking's irrepressible and

friendly interest to others. Many a cross-examination he had passed through in the past.

"It is most kind of you," responded Lord D'Enville solemnly.

"There!" she exclaimed in triumph, "I always say people only want taking the right way. We shall have you becoming an ornament to the county again before long. It is such a mistake for people to allow themselves to be——"

Mr. Larking interrupted. He never quite knew where his better half's tongue would carry her. Once let it start and it took complete possession of its owner, and ran at its own sweet will in any direction, heedless of obstacles.

"Hush, my dear," he exclaimed. "We have come to watch the cricket, and if you once begin to talk all else will be at an end."

"You are very rude, Mr. Larking," she retorted. "Don't you believe him, Lord D'Enville; he is always poking fun at me."

"I shall not pay any attention to him, Mrs. Larking," he replied in some amusement. The woman so evidently meant to be agreeable that he could not have snubbed her, even if he wanted to, which he did not.

"We are all so fond of your dear nephew, you know," she prattled on, "he and Hubert are such friends—quite inseparable. It is such a pleasure to have him over."

"Your son's society is both an immense advantage and pleasure to Harry."

Mrs. Larking beamed. Hubert was as the apple of his parents' eyes, but especially did his mother idolise him. He bore her somewhat aggressive affection with admirable composure and no little

inward embarrassment. He ~~wished~~ his mother would appreciate the fact that, however fond she might be of him, it was possible to remain alive without his praises being forced down everybody's throat on all occasions.

"It is nice of you to say that. I am sure Hubert is very lucky to get him."

Mrs. Larking was wondering how she should make the most of this opportunity. Already she saw herself, with considerable complacency, descending in easy fluent terms on the intimacy which existed between Lord D'Enville and themselves. She already caught the glances of envy, the sniffs of incredulity, with which her statements would be received, and her simple soul was borne up with the ultimate triumph which would be hers. At the moment her energies must be applied to persuading him to come and have tea.

He consented at once—to her intense delight. In truth, it was so long since he had seen a woman to speak to he was quite bewildered, and could devise no quicker method of escaping.

"This must be an augury of better things," resumed his hostess, as they made their way towards the house.

"I beg your pardon?" responded the victim politely.

"You cannot after this continue to shut yourself up in such a disgraceful way," she said playfully. "I was always telling George," she glanced fondly at her husband, "that you were a myth, and not really there at all."

Mr. Larking laughed. He was pleased himself, he had every right to be if he liked—every Briton has—at the thought of receiving Lord D'Enville

in his own house. There is a glamour surrounding a title—particularly an ancient one—which appeals to some soft place in the mental composition. Those who possess these baubles themselves have an inward consciousness of their superiority, and, though they may successfully hide the fact, derive no little enjoyment from it. The outsider, if of ancient family, affects to despise mere rank, if of recent origin, genealogically, affects to despise both rank and family but secretly the commoner of old descent would rarely decline a coronet—the title being taken from his long-held estates—and the new man would accept the title as a sign that personal worth is the equal of inherited attributes, which are the result of accident. Of course, for no other reason.

Mrs. Larking contrived to extract a promise from her guest that he would come to dinner later on, which raised her to the sixth heaven of satisfaction. She rose several inches, metaphorically, in her own esteem, and perhaps added a temporary half-inch in actual fact. When he left Mr Larking accompanied him down the drive.

"I am sorry to hear you are bothered," remarked Lord D'Enville, with kindly interest.

Mrs. Larking had poured into his ears as many details of their private affairs as time permitted.

"We are having rather an anxious time at present in the City—but everyone is in the same way."

"So I understand."

"The only man who seems able to thrive on these bad times is the one whose competition we have to fear."

"Indeed?"

"Howard Leonardson."

"Oh, I have heard of him. A rising financier, is he not?"

"Rather more than that. Risen, you might say. He himself is, I am told, retiring from active work to spend the millions he has amassed."

"I knew something about the man in the old days," said Lord D'Enville thoughtfully. "He had not an over-savoury reputation if I remember."

Mr. Larking laughed. "That is all forgotten long ago. His name is as good as Rothschild's now. It is fortunate we have not to deal with the man himself—only his associates. He has a wonderful genius for the game."

"The game?"

"Of getting the best of a deal. But he is bent on politics now, and society—no doubt with an end in view."

"Yes, a man of that kind usually looks over the wall before climbing it. I have no doubt he will be a great success, if he is as rich as you say."

"I should not care to possess a quarter of his income," remarked Mr. Larking. "Well, good-bye, delighted to have seen you here at last. I hope you will come again." The speaker smiled comprehendingly.

Lord D'Enville's lips twitched.

"I will when I must," he replied.

They both laughed and shook hands heartily. They understood each other.

Harry joined his uncle—he had been behind with Hubert.

"That is something new for you, Uncle Henry," he remarked.

"Harry," Lord D'Enville replied, with a twinkle in his eye, "I do not deny that women have their

place in creation, but I am quite convinced that I have no desire to remain in the neighbourhood of that particular spot. Mrs. Larking is an admirable woman in many ways. I shall be pleased to dine with her—she will be gratified. She is an excellent mother and wife, the essence of kindness and good-nature, but——” He paused.

“Yes?” said Harry.

“I am glad I am not Mr. Larking,” was the grave reply.

CHAPTER XVI

The remainder of the holidays passed rapidly enough for Harry—what with his cricket practice, and the amount of time he now spent with his uncle, who gave him a good deal to do in regard to estate matters. They rode together on most mornings, and he always gave an hour or two to amusing his young cousins. They were only four and five years old now, and their father, at present, left them a great deal to their nurses. He had them down to lunch occasionally, and after tea for an hour, and he took them out driving when he went. They regarded him with affectionate awe, and the big-hearted, soured man wished he understood them, but he did not. He had very definite ideas on the subject of their education when they were a year or two older, but now he was half afraid of, though entirely devoted to them. Harry spent any spare time he could with them, and they considered him a most entertaining and exciting individual.

The evenings tried him sorely. After dinner his uncle usually read, sometimes they played chess, but ever when he was alone the weight of his trouble descended afresh, and lay like lead on his mind.

At last, ten days before he was due to return to Eton, the case came on. Nothing was said on the

subject at Stoke D'Enville—it was ignored. The Larkings expressed sympathy in their different ways. Mrs. Larking, to whom it was news, nearly exhausted his self-control by her genuinely kind, but horribly inquisitive sympathy. Mr. Larking said nothing, but shook hands with extra warmth, and Hubert confined himself to a few words of shy condolence.

There it was in large black capitals. Harry's soul shrank as he hung in a state of fascinated indignation over the accounts. There was little enough—but yet how infinitely too much! All was over in a few hours. No defence was offered. No other names appeared. Regret was expressed on both sides. The reports invariably contained a reference, in more or less detail, to Lord D'Enville's own suit, to the antiquity of the family, and the deplorable frequency of these cases among the upper classes.

"It is understood that the respondent has behaved extremely handsomely in the matter of damages," said one journal. "Large sums settled on wife and son," declared a more sensational organ. Would-be moralists improved the occasion by enlarging on the decadence of ancient families, induced by centuries of pampering. In fact, the usual rabble of seekers after lurid details enjoyed their usual feast—only the material was most unfortunately scanty.

Lord D'Enville and Harry went on as though nothing out of the common was happening. But every now and again they exchanged a glance, and looked hastily away with some trivial remark upon the weather or the chances of a good hay crop. When that day and night came to an end Harry felt

ten years older—in actual fact he probably partially underwent the physical phenomenon of changing from boy's to man's estate.

By an old arrangement, which he somehow still looked forward to, he and Kirby were to spend the last night of the holidays at the Mulford's house in Prince's Gate, and do a theatre together. Harry's long brooding and the injury to his pride were telling on him, and nature started to react. He began to experience a desire, uncontrollable after a while, to do something desperate—at least, to find a safety-valve in some direction for the pent-up accumulation of bitter ranklings against fate. In his mood at the time he wanted to get his own back. The world had jeered at him, put his name in the stocks, and thrown addled eggs at it and bad cabbages. Very well, the world might go to the devil, he did not care, and would defy the whole rotten system.

He kept this inclination under, from which it gathered volume. On the surface he controlled himself, and to those about him appeared graver, more of the man, though not otherwise altered. But he did not know what to do—how to rid himself of the stigma; it seemed that everyone would know, that the finger of scorn would be levelled at him by high and low alike.

When he met Kirby in London he was in a reckless, boisterous state of mind. His cousin wondered a little at his seeming hardness; he had expected to find Harry more or less subdued.

"We will have a real bust to-night, K.," the latter declared.

The other was always willing to do what anybody wanted in an agreeable manner, and raised no obstacles.

The two boys dined at the Ritz, and drank a bottle of champagne between them, also a liqueur with their coffee. By this time Harry was well worked up. His eyes shone with suppressed excitement, and he longed to find a vent for his spirits. They laughed a shade uproariously now and then, but there was not much time to do more than get through dinner before starting for the musical comedy they proposed to patronise.

Securing a taxicab they set off in a most contented state. Harry had succeeded in throwing off his depression, and looked on life from what he considered a more practical standpoint. After all, he was making himself miserable over nothing. Lots of ripping people he knew would laugh at his childish ideas. What did it matter what the common people said or did? He was a D'Enville, and the words of the motto of the garter came into his head. He meant to live, to get the best out of life, as he well could with his chances. A fellow was all the more interesting, the boy allowed himself to imagine, for a little somewhat mysterious sauce added to his reputation. People should see he intended to play the man. He was at the age, and his experience taught him to think, when in the right mood, that there is something fine in wickedness, in being wantonly vicious. It would put the stamp of a man upon him.

"What are we going to do afterwards, K.?" he asked, as they sped smoothly and easily along the brightly lit-up streets, winding in and out of the slower traffic. The glamour of night in London was on the scene. Carriages, cabs, electric broughams thronged theatre-wards, men with coats over their evening dress hurried along the pavements,

for the sky was cloudless and the walking dry—women of all kinds jostled the passers-by.

Harry felt exhilarated and Kirby complacently self-satisfied—he was never put out.

“Anything you like, old chap,” he remarked, with a slight lisp, due to the cigar he was smoking, “supper at the Savoy, if that meets with your approval.”

“By the way,” said Harry, “don’t you know one of the fellows acting in this piece?”

“Yes—old Tom Spender, an awful good sort.”

“Well, send him a note, and get him to take us behind. Perhaps we can get hold of someone for supper.”

“By Jove! yes, well done, Harry, you do get an idea at times,” Kirby agreed—“not half a bad notion. I’m your man.”

The piece was a typical musical comedy, the scenes dainty and alluring, the chorus to match—or so our friends thought. The songs were catchy, the dances seductive. The dialogue suited their calibre, and they were adequately primed to appreciate the jokes. Altogether the evening promised to be a huge success.

Kirby despatched the note, with a lordly *pour-boire*, to his friend Spender—a popular young actor with a nice voice and attractive manner—and received a favourable reply. As a matter of fact, Spender roared with laughter when he received the epistle, but being a good-natured young man, and not unwilling to oblige Lord Kirby, he arranged a nice little party, which he judged would meet the requirements of his two young friends—Kirby mentioned he had a cousin with him—and give them plenty of harmless amusement.

In due course they enjoyed the felicity of being introduced to two delightful young women, who immediately put them at their ease, incidentally declaring that they adored boys. It was somehow not derogatory to be called boys by these fascinating creatures ; indeed, it indicated a pleasing degree of familiarity.

Eventually they were left alone for a moment or two while their new friends put on cloaks. Harry moved down a short passage to watch a man hauling on a complicated jumble of ropes. He was about to address him when a door opened in front of him at the other end of the passage, and, to his amazement, he found himself face to face with his father.

He stood motionless and rigid for a moment, unable to speak or even think. The meeting was so wholly unexpected. Then his brain cleared, the fumes of the champagne no longer affected him—suddenly he sobered into the grave youth of the last few weeks at Stoke D'Enville.

Charles D'Enville stopped, too, but quickly recovered himself.

"Hullo, Harry," he exclaimed, "delighted to see you. Quite a stranger ;" he patted him kindly on the shoulder.

Kirby, drawn by the sound of voices, came up, and Mr. D'Enville shook hands with him. He had not offered to do so with Harry—in truth, he was by no means sure of the boy, or how he would behave.

"Father," said Harry at last.

"That is so," replied the other lightly.

They made a curious picture, and the likeness between them was very obvious. The one appeared

what he was—a well-born, well-dressed man of the world—tall, thin, and with an air of breeding. His clothes were immaculate, a diamond stud adorned his shirt—a moderate-sized diamond—his hair was beautifully brushed, though beginning to show signs both of greyness and retrogression as to the temples; however, this only served to add a touch of dignity. A carefully trimmed moustache covered his mouth, hiding any sign of weakness in its lines, but the chin fell away slightly, contradicting the intelligence and possibility of strength in the eyes and brow.

Harry, on the other hand, could stand the test of a closer inspection. His face bore a singular resemblance to his father's, but, from some more remote influence than either of his parents, the weakness was not so much in evidence. When his jaw set, as it did now, his face almost gave the idea of strength. Any habitual want of firmness in his expression could be more justly attributed to careless good-nature than lack of character. He inherited the air of breeding, the thin, aristocratic features, and the long, graceful figure.

"I have wanted to talk to you," said Harry in a queer voice.

He was not quite master of himself. He was only conscious that this man was responsible for the disgrace he was engaged in dismissing from his mind at the very instant their ways chanced to cross. Somehow Harry realised that he had not yet succeeded in overcoming the oppression which had held him in its grip at Stoke D'Enville. Also he felt absurdly young again.

"At any time you please," replied his father easily, "except the present. It is such a very badly

arranged place for private conversation. No doubt you also have other engagements."

"When?" said the boy, solemnly.

"To-morrow, if you like, but I am very full up just now."

At this moment another door opened, and Harry saw a tall handsome woman, whom he recognised as Clare Fitz-Nevil, standing by them. He had never heard her name yet in connection with his father. She had not appeared in the case. Charles D'Enville had arranged otherwise, so as not to injure her career.

"Charles," she observed, "I thought I heard you talking. Why, who is this?" She put her hand on Harry's arm and turned him round towards her. He was too bewildered to notice. "It must be your son Harry?" she continued, looking the question, "there is a great likeness."

"You are absolutely correct; it is," he replied, without a sign of embarrassment. "May I introduce you, my son—Miss Fitz-Nevil, a very old friend. This," he indicated him, "is Lord Kirby, a cousin of—ahem—of my son's." He had been on the point of saying "my wife's."

"Come into my room," she said, after smiling at Kirby, who was lost in wonder. "You wait, will you?" she added to the latter. She forthwith drew the unresisting Harry inside. His father followed, and closed the door.

"I have often wanted to see you," she said to Harry.

"Yes?" he muttered, still at a loss. Some vague idea of the truth began to permeate through the fog, but nothing definite.

"You are a nice-looking boy," she murmured, half to herself.

Charles D'Enville coughed. He was a shade uncomfortable himself. The woman alone seemed to see nothing odd about the position.

"So *you* are his son, are you?" Her voice was contemplative, and she glanced from *on* to the other. "Such a one as I should have liked."

"Ahem," came from Mr. D'Enville.

"What's the matter, Charles? There is nothing to hide now! I am not ashamed of *loving* you."

Harry grew hot. He could think of *nothing* to meet the case. She struck him as such a good sort. Her face was absolutely simple and kindly. Her eyes held such a friendly light. His father turned and fingered some odds and ends on the dressing-table.

"I don't understand," the boy muttered.

"Your father and I are going to be married later on," she said, in an even tone, but with a soft glow on her face.

It sounded perfectly natural as she said it, and Harry was not conscious of surprise; only he suddenly seemed to see his father in a new light—as a stranger, someone he knew nothing about.

"Married!" he repeated helplessly.

"Yes—at last," she sighed. "I have hoped for it for years—it seems too good to be true." Her voice became abstracted again.

Harry roused himself.

"Is this correct?" he demanded of his father.

"You surely do not doubt a lady's word?"

"But, but——" stammered the boy.

"But what?" asked Clare Fitz-Nevil gently.

There was no answer. He could not say anything offensive about her in her presence.

Charles D'Enville maintained a distant demeanour.

This scene bored him intensely. He wished the unfortunate encounter had not taken place. Really, the young club had no business playing these pranks at his age. Goodness only knew what Clare might say next. As to this marriage, he might have alluded to matrimony in a moment of expansiveness, but he had certainly not considered the matter as finally settled. Women had such an infernal trick of taking things for granted. He was by no means sure what he meant to do about it. She suited him very well, and she would soon be able to hold her own in society, but, if he was going to be a really rich man, he might more than possibly prefer not to commit himself. He determined to put an end to this tiresome interview, at any rate, without more ado.

"Now then," he said, "when you two have quite finished. It is late."

His indifference stung Harry. Surely there was more in it than a few words? Then, in a flash, he grew indignant. What right had this man to take it so calmly when their name had just been befouled, when his mother and he had suffered so much? In his quick rage he did not stop to weigh his words.

"Uncle Henry was quite right when he said mother was well rid of you!" He threw his head back and glared defiantly at the author of his being.

"How good of him!" drawled Mr. D'Enville—"such a fraternal remark."

Clare watched this passage. Then she broke in:

"What do you mean, boy?" Her idol was being abused. In her eyes, at any rate, it was composed of fine marble.

"He has ruined my life," muttered Harry, with

pardonable exaggeration and a consciousness that this woman deserved respect in some peculiar way.

"He?" she ejaculated in amazement. "Charles ruins your life? Why he is to give you and—and—your mother fifty thousand pounds, as soon as he is free."

"I don't want his dirty money," he returned sulkily, his eye on his father.

The latter was leaning gracefully against a table, his feet crossed in front of him. He was opening a cigarette-case and, with the light on his face and on his wavy, slightly grey hair, looked undeniably handsome, even distinguished.

"What an unworldly sentiment!" he commented, striking a match. "You will never get on if you permit yourself to indulge in such mistaken views." He applied the match to his cigarette.

"How can you say such things!" burst out Clare, with reference to Harry's statement. She was hugely indignant now. "He has behaved most generously to both you and—that woman," she concluded—anger conquering her natural mildness.

"That woman!" Harry was thunderstruck. His mother—that woman.

"Are you speaking of Mrs D'Enville?" he inquired coldly.

"Who else?" she snapped, raising her tone.

"Permit me to suggest that there is no occasion for heat," put in Charles D'Enville. "It is more than warm in here as it is. You should really complain to the management, Clare, on the inadequacy of the system of ventilation."

Neither took any notice of the peacemaker.

"How dare you!" said Harry. "You—to speak of my mother in that way;" the scorn was intense.

Clare put her arms on her hips—the attitude natural to her in moments of exaltation.

"I should like to know what else I am to call her?" she asked in high dudgeon.

"I must request you to refrain from mentioning her at all," the boy declared with dignity. "I will now go. I am sorry I ever came in."

He moved towards the door without looking at his father. The latter watched the scene with some interest. It amused him.

But Clare stepped in front of him and placed her back to the exit.

"Not so fast, young man. I should like to know your meaning. Why shouldn't I talk about your precious mother, if I choose!"

Her usual placid temperament was stirred to the depths, and while her words came hurriedly—without the habitual polish—her manner showed she was genuinely aggrieved.

"Because you are not fit——" he began.

"I beg of you," his father called out, "to desist from this useless wrangling. Let the boy go, Clare, there's a dear."

"I shall not, until he apologises to you—and me," she answered.

"Well, Harry, don't you think it is up to you to make amends?"

"She insulted mother," the boy said, his head high.

"Hoity-toity, who is talking about insult?" the angry woman retorted. "I may be wicked, I don't say I'm not," her tone altered and the gentle-

ness returned into her face ; "but it is for love," then she drew herself up, "not for money."

Charles D'Enville emitted a low whistle. He was deriving more entertainment from the interview than he anticipated. He would have preferred to stop it, but, since they were determined—or Clare was—to go on, he could not interfere without a lot of bother.

"What do you mean ? " demanded his son.

"I know all about that Howard Leonardson," she said.

"Howard Leonardson ? "

"Oh, it's news to you, is it ? "

"Really——" deprecated Mr. D'Enville.

"Be quiet, Charles. Well then, you ask your dear mother when she is going to marry your new father, Mr. Howard Leonardson, Esquire, and how much money she owes him. How much he has paid and is going to pay Charles and her for this divorce."

Charles D'Enville sprang forward, he had not expected such plain speaking. How could she know so much ? In her slow mind she must have stored up bits of information till she had hit upon the truth. It was a bore. Pushing her on one side, he opened the door.

"You had better go," he said to Harry.

When she saw the effect of her speech on the boy, Clare realised what she was doing. Passion had blinded her for the moment. In cold blood she would not have hurt a fly, and already she regretted the words. After all he was a boy, and very like Charles. Besides, he was defending his mother. That was it—his mother ! The one person she hated, who, she thought, had kept Charles from

her for so many years That was what upset her

"It was his fault for talking so about me and that woman"

She threw herself into a chair and began to sob feebly, dabbling at her eyes with a towel she picked up Harry was gone For a moment she thought the boy would have struck her, then he had seemed to collapse He obeyed his father's voice mechanically

"It's all right" declared Charles D'Enville reassuringly "It won't hurt him There, don't distress yourself"

Kirby, waiting outside, heard voices raised in altercation, but caught no words. Then Harry emerged with a white, drawn face

"Hullo, what's up?" he asked anxiously

"Come on Harry answered I'm going back"

"Here, what about the supper?"

Spender appeared round the corner "Are you fellows ready?" he asked

"I am sorry I can't come," said Harry Then his feelings overcame him and he rushed away Kirby stopped to explain

"He met his father, they went in there"

Spender formed his lips to whistle, but no sound came

"Great Caesar! I never thought of that By Jove! I see—sorry, I will make it right with the girls So long"

"So long," answered Kirby. "I'm awfully sorry," and he hurried after Harry

There was no sign of him anywhere in the theatre. Kirby went outside and looked about. Harry was

not in sight. He had left his hat and coat in the cloak-room. Kirby went back and secured them. He was a philosopher in his youthful way.

"I call this real dead-sea fruit," he muttered as he got into a cab. "I always thought it happened the next morning. No more busts with Harry." He had to wait up half an hour before Harry appeared, hatless and wild looking, and then he went to his room without speaking.

CHAPTER XVII

While Harry was in the middle of his evening out, his mother sat at ease in a long chair on the deck of the "Psyche," Leonardson's fine yacht. She lay off the coast of Sicily. For a week the party had cruised peacefully in the genial warmth of the Mediterranean sunshine—the Mulfords, their elder daughter and her husband, Maie D'Enville, Lord Frankote, one of their host's colleagues in the city, and a sister of Lord Mulford's. They had joined the vessel at Marseilles, and the affair had been a great success from Leonardson's point of view.

He had planned this trip to divert Maie's mind from the case. Only her relations and Frankote, an old friend, were included. It was a matter of some surprise to him that Mrs. D'Enville should have consented to come, but, truth to tell, she was in a thoroughly reckless mood. The severing of her only settled hold on life had deranged the rather flimsy foundations of her creed.

She was like a boat long moored, adequately if not immovably, to the shore, which is cut adrift at a moment's notice and carried headlong into the swift-running, turbulent rapids, where rocks lie ready on all sides to wreck the flimsy wanderer which tosses, rudderless and uncontrolled, among their ragged points. Some submerged, with the

water breaking more roughly as a hint of the peril, others showing—a dark menace—above the surface. Whether the quiet haven of the deep pool below could be gained in safety was more than doubtful.

The comparison came into her mind as she watched, with unseeing eyes, the lights of a coast village drifting, as it were, past them. The engines of the yacht were moving at quarter speed and almost silently, the throb and corresponding quiver of the fabric of the vessel being barely perceptible. It was a perfect night, calm and warm, and her sole companion at the moment was Lady Mulford. The others were playing bridge below, but her head was aching and she had excused herself.

"Have you thought, Maie, where all this is leading?" inquired Lady Mulford, after a short silence. They had been discussing Leonardson, as people frequently did when his way touched theirs.

The other laughed nervously, with a hard note striking a discord in the sound.

"Oh, I suppose so," she answered.

"You are not a child and no doubt you have counted the cost. You don't mind my talking to you like that?"

"Mind? Why should I? I am glad enough to think anyone cares what happens to me." The tone was as bitter as the words.

Lady Mulford was troubled. She recognised that her friend was in a bad way. Hers was not the temperament to stand alone—something would happen, one of two alternatives. She must marry again as soon as she could or there would be disaster. Harry was the only check, and he would gradually be more cut off from his mother, by the fact of his

growing up and going out into the world, than he was even at Eton.

"You are Mulford's first cousin," she resumed, "and he is your nearest relation, so I look upon you as a very dear member of the family, as well as a friend."

"I know, Connie. You are awfully good to me. I--I—" Her voice broke. "I am worn out by it all. You don't know what it is to be without any support—to be bereft of all the ropes and anchors that kept one from the whirlpool—or, if you prefer, to lose the lifebelt that supported one's head above the water—pah! It is a rotten show altogether," she ended abruptly, with her usual careless laugh.

"But you are young yet, Maie. You can start afresh—you are depressed just now. In the morning you will be as sanguine as a schoolgirl."

"I dare say. I know I bob up and down like a cork. The further you push it under the higher it skips next time. But at this instant something has shoved me down—the deuce of a way—as my late lamented would have put it." She laughed again, lightly but with a bitter, mocking accent.

Lady Mulford shivered.

"Don't talk of him like that. It makes me quite creepy at this time of night—with the darkness, and the waters lapping the yacht's sides. Flippancy is out of place, and you sound quite desperate."

"I feel it, my dear. It is all very well for you, safe behind your solid wall of respectability. Mulford may be pompous and a fool, but he is devoted to you, and not unlike a good-natured piece of oak in his own way. I often tell him so."

"Your description, if candid, is not inaccurate,"

replied the other, smiling ; " he suits me admirably. A clever husband would bore me to extinction."

" And you him. You are much too nice, and you would have brains enough to be able to argue with him. Clever men should marry silly girls who will sit and gape at them with their mouths open—like frogs—till their colossal vanity is more or less satisfied. No one is so conceited as a clever husband—I say husband to indicate that he expects his better half to smother him in adulation as a make-up for the snubs he gets from the cleverer men he meets outside."

" There is another variety of brains, though," Lady Mulford said.

" Oh, of course, there are a few with common sense as well. They have a much worse time, because they find out they have been mistaking paste for diamonds—it happens within a month after the ceremony—and worry over it.—As if any woman was worth worrying over ? " Mrs. D'Enville addressed her question to the stars.

" Don't disparage your poor sex in that way, you might be overheard by some man."

" He wouldn't believe me if he did. They are as pigheaded and opinionated as we are soft and spasmodic. If you tell a man anything he thinks may be true, he immediately sets to work to prove that it isn't."

" Your headache is better," said Lady Mulford, " you are becoming sarcastic. But, seriously, what about this particular specimen ? "

" Mr. Leonardson ? He deserves a class to himself, I think."

" Do you mean to marry him ? " queried Lady Mulford, casually.

"Don't be so abrupt," Mrs. D'Enville replied in a discontented tone; "just when I was forgetting my woes, you go and start the whole pot boiling again. How can I possibly answer such a question off-hand?"

"Do be serious, Maie. I don't know what has come over you lately. There is no sense in drifting."

"I shall become a Mahommedan, I think, Connie, and leave everything to fate. Then, whatever happens, I can strike an attitude and say, 'Kismet.' It is a sweet notion, don't you think so? So comforting to put the blame on such a very indefinite individual—is 'Kismet' an individual?"

Lady Mulford was troubled. She did not like her friend's mood and she did not want her to marry Leonardson. The precise reason of this sentiment she could not have defined. In spite of his wealth, his magnetism, the success which had already attended him socially; in spite of his ability and the stamp of power which was patent to all who associated with him, she hoped Maie would not marry him. The advantages were so clear, the arguments in favour of the idea so cogent, that she wondered at her instinctive objection. It was nothing more than instinct—but she was unable to master the feeling.

"I fancy Mr. Leonardson might conceivably stand for the human incarnation of the idea. He looks the part."

Mrs. D'Enville relapsed into thought.

"Naturally I have considered it, Connie," she said after a pause. "But there is something uncanny about the man—apart from his low origin. I could put up with that—if—if——"

"You cared for him?"

"Connie, you are allowing yourself to become romantic in your old age."

"Don't be cynical," returned Lady Mulford placidly; "it is a much more certain sign of grey hair and false teeth."

"It is the fruit of which experience is the flower in my case—but I was really wondering how he and Harry would hit it off."

"It sounds a rather original test for suitors."

"As well he as another. I candidly confess he interests me, and he has an undeniable fascination."

"If I did not know you as well as I do-----"

"Oh, rats!" declared Mrs. D'Enville. "Who ever takes anyone at their word? Talk of the — 'tiger,' " she muttered.

Howard Leonardson came up. "I am out of it for a rubber," he explained, dropping into a chair the other side of Mrs. D'Enville.

His manner had acquired more ease and confidence during the last few weeks. He had found his feet and felt at home where, at first, the going had been somewhat tricky.

Lady Mulford rose. "I am leaving you," she said. After all, she knew the man wanted to be alone with Maie, and it was only polite. Besides, Maie was no chicken—and Leonardson unquestionably a catch. Maie must remake her own bed, no one could do it for her. Silence reigned for a brief space after Lady Mulford departed.

"I trust I have succeeded in mitigating your worry?" he asked in a low voice.

"The trip has been delightful," she rejoined sincerely. She felt he had done his best to please her—and the motive was not unflattering. She owed him gratitude, at any rate. "And what is worry,

after all ? It serves as the necessary stimulus to a subsequent enjoyment. Pleasure is only comparative."

"And gains in inverse ratio to the preceding condition," put in the financier.

"I was never good at mathematics," his companion returned.

"It is my great hope that the future may compensate you in proportion to your past—sorrow."

"You are assuming I have had a very bad time, if that is intended as a nice speech."

"I almost hope it—on one condition."

"What is that ?"

"That I may be the one favoured of the gods to provide the compensation—and that you deign to accept it in the same measure as I offer it."

"That sounds like two conditions."

"They would merge into one—if they are fulfilled."

She did not reply to this, but tapped softly on the deck with her foot. The great yacht glided smoothly on through the gloom. They were further from land now, only a distant lighthouse threw its white gleam over the water—a warning to wanderers on the ocean to beware of the rocks.

His voice vibrated slightly, like a wire suddenly strung up very taut, when he spoke again.

"I have been patient—for me. Tell me, do you think I could ?" He put his hand on the arm of her chair and bent towards her.

"I think you could do most things you undertook."

"I have never desired to succeed as I do now."

"They say that no one has withstood you—in business."

"I have ventured into a new field, where the ground is strange. I would have you show me the way. You are free to do it now." Leonardson sank his voice lower still. "Maie, you know what I want. When the time comes, will you marry me?"

Here was harbour for her, of a kind. A luxurious, splendid harbour—if she were willing to pay the dues.

"You do not let the grass grow under your feet," she answered with an easy laugh.

It was no small triumph to have this man at her feet—the "master of many millions," as Connie Mulford had once named him—suing for her favour. She was not blind to the opportunity. Money meant much to her, money as this man owned it would put the world at *her* feet also. She was no girl, crying for romance—but, though her freedom was as yet, unstamped, she enjoyed the sensation, in a way despite the sense of isolation, and there was no necessity to rush things.

"I have waited for this moment since that night I first saw you."

"What an alarming person you are! You sound like a kind of fate hanging over one." She thought of the simile Connie had used a few minutes before.

"I am not a boy, Maie," he said, calling her by her Christian name again, "nor even a weak man. I know what I want and I intend to have it—with your permission," he concluded earnestly.

"I am glad you put that in. I began to think it was a minor detail."

"I can give you—much," he said.

"You are trying to bribe me." Her tone was

trivial again, as though they were talking of the weather.

He smiled grimly. Since she could not marry him for months yet, he liked her attitude. What he wanted at the moment was to peg out his claim—to leave no doubt of the ultimate issue—to make his purpose plain beyond all question.

"Is a bribe required?" he queried.

"You are too hasty, Mr. Leonardson. I must have time." She spoke now in a serious tone. "You forget."

"Pshaw," he exclaimed. "You are trifling. What is that man to you? What has he been for—years?"

"He was my husband. I bore his name." She thought of her boy suddenly. He bore the same name. He was Charles's son. A sensation of self-reproach stirred her.

"My son," she exclaimed, "Harry! He is everything to me now."

Leonardson laid his hand on her arm, reaching over the arm of her chair.

"Do you suppose I have forgotten him? After you, he shall be my first care. But have you thought that soon, in a year or two, he will be out in the world, that you will see little of him?"

She stayed still under his touch. Certainly the man held some power over her. She recognised that. If she yielded to him, it would be completely.

"What would you do for him?"

"He shall be rich beyond his wildest dreams. If he have the capacity, he shall be great among the great ones of the earth. I will 'make' him. With me behind him, my power and influence, he need stop at nothing. Would you have him soldier,

statesman, diplomatist, his way shall be made easy. It is for you to say. That is a mere bagatelle. Ask me for something more than that."

She listened, fascinated. He was on the right tack here. The way to her heart lay open. With all his other cards, this one should put the result finally beyond doubt.

"You would do that for him?"

Leonardson felt he would do anything she liked for the boy once he had her. It was a fine stroke in his favour.

"You can try me." He got up and stood before her, resolute, forceful, a man—in his way.

"I think we both understand," he said, assuming a lighter tone, "the right principles of matrimony." He was confident he had won her, and inwardly his fierce desire to possess her knew the keen joys of anticipation.

Mrs. D'Enville pulled herself together. She had not intended to let him go so far, but he was not easily held.

"In that case we should never commit it," she retorted; "but this is absurd, Mr. Leonardson——"

He interrupted her. "Will you not use my name?"

She got up also. "You take too much for granted, altogether. Let us go in to the others."

He seized her hand, and, looking straight into her eyes, raised it to his lips, as he had done once before. She made a motion to resist, but a half-hearted one. Fate—or Leonardson—seemed to be deciding her affairs for her. She was weary and disinclined for strenuous effort, either mental or physical. She would let herself drift—for the present. The next

day they started back for Marseilles, overland.

When Mrs D'Enville reached England again she went straight down to see Harry. The flat in London was hers now—it had been so arranged between her and Chukles—and she just called in there to refresh herself after the journey. She had not seen the boy since the case and could wait no longer. Besides, there was much to talk about. In her heart of hearts she had relinquished the idea of refusing Leonardson, though she fully recognised that she was not in love with him. He was too strong for her—she was dazzled by his wealth and fascinated by his personality. She also wanted to see Harry, to sound him on this subject. She wired to announce the time of her arrival, and travelled down in a more cheerful frame of mind than had been hers for weeks. There seemed some solid ground in front of her at last and even though she might not have selected the particular site on her own account, it had its points.

Harry waited in restless impatience, stalking up and down the platform. He had come back to Eton the previous day in a very wretched state. Ever since the scene at the theatre he had spoken only when obliged. Kirby, well-meaning and perturbed, received surly monosyllables when he attempted to discover the trouble or offer sympathy.

For Harry's pride was laid low this time with a vengeance. It never occurred to him to doubt Clare Fitz-Nevil's words. His father's face had amply confirmed them when he opened the door for him, Harry's, exit.

And now he had to go through this coming

interview with his mother and decide what was to be done. His uncle he would consult afterwards. Meanwhile the boy thought his way lay plain before him. This Leonardson, who was he to interfere at his will with the D'Envilles?

It happened that the train halted with the customary grating jerk so that he found himself opposite his mother's compartment. She smiled brightly at him, delighted to see him again, and with her troubles forgotten for the time being. The boy turned the handle of the door and stood with a grave, set face as she hurried out. He bent solemnly and kissed her.

"Good heavens, Harry, you might be a mute! Whatever is the matter?" she asked cheerfully, regarding him in some bewilderment.

He took her coat and replied quietly:

"Let's get back to my tutor's." He beckoned to a cabman, and they drove down the Castle Hill into Eton, Mrs. D'Enville talking eagerly and asking questions about his holidays—to which he responded laconically.

He paid the driver with the same sedate manner with which he had received her, and they ascended the stairs to his room.

"Your state chamber is as large and luxurious as ever," she observed lightly.

Harry took no notice. He closed the door, and, with his hands buried in his pockets, began to pace backwards and forwards. Four or five steps each way brought him to the end of the limited fairway, and he wheeled sharply each time with a motion reminiscent of a spring held in check.

"About this fellow Leonardson?" he commenced, going straight to the point.

Mrs. D'Enville opened her eyes a little, but did not alter the easy position she had assumed in the low wicker armchair.

"What about him?" she asked.

Inwardly she was far from comfortable—not from any personal misgivings, but she knew Harry must be seriously perturbed about something. The signs were unmistakable; she had noticed it directly she saw him at the station. She was at a disadvantage. With anyone else it was simple enough to hold one's own, but when your only son is indignant and assumes the mien of an avenging judge, it is not fair. He can carry the weak places by assault, and the strong places do not exist for him. She would do anything to avoid a scene with Harry. It tore her heart, as nothing else in the world could, to see him angry or upset, not because she minded anger or dismay, but because he happened to be her son—the solitary object on which she bestowed unselfish devotion in lavish profusion.

"I understand all this—this trouble is due to his infernal meddling."

"Harry!" exclaimed his mother, in genuine surprise.

"I have had about enough of it," he was not far from breaking down, in spite of his fine air, "it is no joke the family being besmirched like this. I haven't seen you since before the case——"

"I couldn't bear it, Harry. Mr. Brabourne arranged everything, and there was no necessity. I thought you would be best with your uncle."

"I am not complaining of that," he asserted hardily, "it is the proper thing, I suppose, for solicitors to arrange these matters, and there was naturally rather a muddle while it was being done."

What I want to know, mother, is what Leonardson had to do with it exactly ?

" Oh, Harry," she leaned forward eagerly, speaking fast, " he has been more than kind. I want you to like him. He is the best friend I have got." Mrs. D'Enville sought for means to express herself so as to convey to the boy some idea of the extent of her intimacy with the financier.

" What is his object ? " demanded Harry. He was thinking hard. If he told all he knew straight away, no doubt his mother would be annoyed ; anyhow, she would say no more about him.

She hesitated. " Object ? I suppose—probably he is glad to be of service."

" Why ? " pursued Harry.

" Perhaps he—likes me," she replied, eyeing him a shade anxiously.

" You wouldn't marry the creature ? "

Harry shot out the words fiercely. His indignation nearly choked him. The pent-up agony of the last two days must find relief. He had learnt to look at facts and think for himself—all the more since his ' spree '—and the effect was to sober him once and for all. The attempt to carry it off with a high hand, to show the world that a trifle like a divorce could be disregarded, had completely broken down. It had been only a counsel of despair from his sensitive heart. In future he must be, in actual fact, his mother's guardian. She had made a fearful mess of things to get into this bother, and he was determined to prevent any schemes that Leonardson might have conceived. It was fairly clear to him what the fellow aimed at—he must make quite sure.

"Really," said Mrs. D'Enville, "you are horribly direct——"

Harry interrupted.

"Is it true you owe him money? That he has paid for the divorce—large sums to father—to make him consent?"

She started. This was a fresh development. Turning it over in her mind, she saw it was likely enough. She wondered why Leonardson had kept it from her—then she realised he naturally would prefer her not to know.

"It is the first I have heard of it."

"But do you owe him money?"

She paused. It suddenly came home to her that she had received, in a light-hearted way, over two thousand pounds from the man—for the value of her introductions. She had taken it because Charles knew all about it—but that hardly availed now. She got up and moved across to Harry, putting her hand through his arm and drawing him up to her.

"What is all this?" she asked. "Where have you picked it all up from?" Her face was wistful as she spoke, and Harry was suddenly very sorry for her. His mother, all he had. He made her sit down again, and told her gently what had happened at the theatre.

When he finished his recital he stood up and started pacing again.

"Now we know what the fellow has done we can give him the chuck," he declared confidently. "There was so clearly no other possible course. I never liked him. He has done harm enough, as it is. This beastly case has worried me a good deal, mother. It is maddening that a low-born beast like that should be able to do it. I can never for-

give father—how could he sink so low? Anyhow, *we* can stick together—can't we?" he glanced with confident appeal at her, "and give him one back for himself that will teach him not to meddle with his betters again."

The words ran off readily from his tongue. It was a relief to know where one stood. Then he perceived that his mother's expression was by no means as responsive as he expected. He halted in perplexity.

"Don't you agree?" he demanded.

Mrs. D'Enville hesitated before answering.

"You are still rather young, Harry," it was difficult to explain her meaning, "and things are not always so simple as they may appear at first sight."

"But——"

"Mr. Leonardson has been a very good friend to me in—many ways. He is an important person. All you have heard may be exaggerated, even untrue——"

"But father practically admitted it," he broke in eagerly.

"You really must permit me to form an opinion occasionally," she went on, with a slight smile to take off any edge from the words. "Suppose I like Mr. Leonardson?"

He gasped. "That beast? After all he has done—disgraced us—plotted to get rid of father—it is abominable—he is a dirty blackguard—a low, dishonourable——"

"Harry," his mother said sharply, "think what you are saying."

"But it's true—it's——" He stopped for want of words, and dug his hands deeper into his pockets, ramping up and down now.

Then he flung himself down on his knees by his mother's chair and took her hands.

"You do agree with me, mother? You aren't serious?"

"I cannot say off-hand. I must think it over."

"But you can't speak to the fellow again?"

She drew him to her and kissed his hair tenderly.

"Don't blame me, Harry, if I cannot do all you ask at once."

He was dazed. He had been so sure of his ground. What did she mean? He hated Leonardson from that moment—with an intense loathing new to his character—where had been only contemptuous dislike before. He must have bewitched her that she did not see. Harry was not religious, yet his natural reverence of an unknown Power for good had not been destroyed. Leonardson's behaviour struck him as so utterly vile in every way, from every standpoint—honour, shame, religion—that he could not comprehend that his mother should not instantly agree with him.

He set to work to try and convince her then—since it was necessary. He begged and implored her to promise to have no more to do with the man. But she would not even say she had given up all idea of marrying him. She could not lie to Harry, even in this strait—for his distress awoke a corresponding echo in her heart. She would not deceive him—he did not understand, poor boy, she thought. He knew nothing of the world. It did not strike her that his ignorance might be of more worth than much learning.

At last a truce was called—an armistice. They had tea together in Windsor, and Mrs. D'Enville returned to her lonely flat heavy at heart. The

only consolation she found was an unsatisfying one. It did not carry conviction when she told herself Harry was prejudiced, and that Leonardson was the man of all others to help the boy on. The boy did not want to be assisted by that particular influence. Still, she told herself, he would come round in time.

Harry sent a telegram to his uncle asking him to come down the next day—Sunday—adding, "Important."

He had made up his mind never to "come round."

CHAPTER XVIII

"Well, Harry," remarked Lord D'Enville gravely, "it is a difficult position." He had anticipated possible embarrassments, but this was early days with a vengeance. "You cannot compel your mother to do this or that—in fact, you can only trust to her good sense to keep her from any rash step."

"She doesn't realise it," the boy declared in a broken voice.

"I am not so sure. She comes straight back from a week on this man's yacht to tell you—what?"

"You mean she meant to tell me she intended to marry him?" asked poor Harry.

"Something of the kind."

"It is iniquitous!" exclaimed the boy in a burst of rage.

"No, foolish. She would be the person to regret it most. On the other hand, I have made one or two inquiries about this Leonardson. His wealth has not been exaggerated. He is one of the richest men in the world. You are old enough to understand that money is—if the root of all evil—the motive power which works the machinery of the majority of things in this world, and the older you grow the more thoroughly you will appreciate the

fact. It is little wonder people make a god of it. There are not a few of those among whom your mother has lived—I know them of old—would sell their souls at a low enough rate, the price of their bodies is naturally even cheaper. I am speaking generally, of course. There are exceptions to every rule. You may take it from me that, considering her chances, her surroundings and her love of pleasure, your mother is a remarkably nice woman."

Harry listened with mixed feelings to this. He and his uncle were walking slowly up the Long Walk in Windsor Park. Lord D'Enville had wired in answer to Harry's telegram to say he would arrive about three, and Harry had obtained leave to be away during the afternoon. There were not many people about. A few other Eton boys were visible—out, perhaps, to see the wild boars which are kept penned in the park, a favourite occupation on Sunday afternoons. The day was warm, and the trees were donning their summer garb. They both preferred to be out of doors, and it was quiet enough here.

Lord D'Enville resumed:

"As I once intimated to you, your father can never have been an easy person to live with. They had not too large an income, and it is no light thing for any woman to refuse such an opportunity as a marriage with this multi-millionaire. I am putting things plainly to you.

"Just conceive what he could give his wife. I hear he is a man of some polish—or veneer; that he is young—forty-five—and personally not in any way objectionable—on the surface. It is a regrettable fact that a woman gains very little advantage from being the petitioner in a divorce case, even if

she is successful. The judgment of the world is always biased against her, and people speedily forget the precise details. In fine, she is a fair mark for the arrows of the hypocrites—a numerous section of the community. You can see then, Harry, that there may be some reason for her hesitating to adopt your view.”

“What am I to do then?”

“There you are putting rather a large question. It is granted that her own position, though perfectly straightforward, is not a bed of roses. I question her ability to ignore the opinion of her fellows;” the speaker’s voice became introspective. “She is, technically, on the same footing as myself, but she has the acknowledged drawback of being a woman. Now I think I may assume that human nature has not greatly changed during the past few years; and were your mother Mrs. Leonardson—provided Mr. Leonardson continues pre-eminent financially—the very same individuals who would otherwise be the first to flout her, to run her down, to whisper innuendoes behind her back, to cut her to her face, would in this case fall over themselves in their anxiety to curry her favour in any possible way. Such is life. I do not compare her case with mine. I am a man, she a charming, if weak, woman. But when I recognised in what a fool’s paradise I had been dwelling, it was no hardship for me to give up my particular niche. I confess I fail to see how she would face what lies before her alone. Presumably she will marry somebody. Here is a man who can not only enable her to hold up her head, but seat her on a pinnacle, above calumny and slights, where she knows full well she will be an object of the most pleasing envy to the many dear

friends who would give anything to be in her place. To forego all this requires some strength of character, indifference to public opinion, the courage of one's own, and it is no small thing to ask of any woman."

"You put it in a new light, Uncle Henry," muttered the boy.

"You have, of course, frequently wondered why your father and I are not on speaking terms?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"At the time my wife ran away from me—poor soul, I hope she found the happiness she sought, but I fear not—he chose the opportunity to make an irregular use of my signature."

"What!" exclaimed Harry.

"I tell you this so that you can both understand the situation thoroughly—it is no longer necessary or desirable to disguise your father's real character—and form a just estimate of the extent to which he is likely to have assisted to develop your mother's good qualities. As I said before, I consider she has received scruffy treatment from the official handicapper in the race of life, and has kept up uncommonly well considering the weight she has had to carry."

"Poor little mother!" the boy murmured, his eyes suddenly moist.

"There is another aspect to the matter," his uncle went on, "which I have not yet alluded to. I am not a religious man, my creed is simple. But there is a higher standard which can be applied to these affairs. I should not care to judge on such lines myself, but such arrangements as we have been discussing are always inexcusable in the opinion of many excellent people. Whether or not every-

body will be judged by this standard I do not propose to offer an opinion. I, personally, hope not, and it is at any rate conceivable that differences of temperament, environment, and opportunity may be taken into consideration when the time comes. Now, I only wish to say that, in spite of the admitted palliations which could be applied to your mother's conduct were she to accept this man—in due course—I trust that she will not do so, and I am prepared to use my earnest endeavours to prevent such a marriage."

Harry took his uncle's arm shyly and pressed it. He could not speak for the moment, but his heart was full of gratitude.

"I would suggest," said Lord D'Enville after a pause, "that you should adopt the following plan."

"Yes?" Harry questioned eagerly.

"I fancy that your mother has a special weakness for a certain son of hers. I further fancy that she would, in the long run, find it difficult, extraordinary as it may seem, to get along without ever seeing that son, particularly if she were conscious that he disapproved so strongly of her behaviour that he declined to hold any communication with her."

"I couldn't," the boy muttered under his breath—then, aloud, he said:

"If it is necessary—I will do anything to stop it."

"It is worth the attempt," continued Lord D'Enville, "only you must harden your heart—it may not be easy."

"What must I do?"

"You had better compose a letter. Do it yourself, to-night, when I am gone. Now let's go back

to your tutor's. I want to have a word with him."

Harry raised a mournful smile at this last sentence, thinking of Mr. Gibson's—his house master—surprise when he beheld Lord D'Enville. The "worthy pedagogue"—as Charles D'Enville invariably and most aptly called him—was wont to speak of Lord D'Enville in terms of commiserating sorrow with a touch of superiority. They had been at Eton together, and, on the strength of the acquaintance then existing, Mr. Gibson considered himself in the light of an old friend when he thought of the other. He had frequently expressed to Harry, in tactful phrases, his sense of the loss sustained by the world in general, and his friends in particular, when his uncle retired into seclusion.

They turned and began to make their way back to Eton.

"You are going through a crisis, Harry, at a trying age," said Lord D'Enville abruptly, in his usual rather curt manner—which he had entirely dropped during the preceding conversation; "it is, in my humble opinion, a blessing in disguise."

"Pretty well disguised," Harry suggested dolefully.

"And none the worse for that, provided you see through it. In fact, they are the best brand, and require a connoisseur to appreciate the full bouquet—like the finest champagne."

Lord D'Enville thought the time had come to try and cheer the boy up a little, and Harry could appreciate humour, even if of the sardonic variety affected by both the D'Enville brothers in their widely different ways.

"I am afraid I have not been educated up to

that point," replied the boy, realising the situation. His father had always instilled into him the folly of taking things too seriously—which is sound policy if not carried to the lengths Mr. D'Enville himself went to.

"Everyone must learn—the thing is to recognise the lesson and profit by it. In that way you may hope, some day, to acquire sufficient philosophy to enjoy the most acidulous vintages, or pretend to—like men who are given a specially nasty bottle of the dryest sherry, which they feel bound to praise and long to spit out. It is excellent training, I assure you."

"It makes one think a bit," said Harry.

"Anything which serves such an end in these days cannot fail to be of incalculable service," his uncle remarked with studied sarcasm.

Harry laughed. "I am glad of one thing, Uncle Henry. I have come to know you."

"It's an ill wind—by the way, have you met such things as proverbs?"

The boy smiled, and Lord D'Enville resumed:

"I was not sure they were included in the modern education. But avoid demonstrations of affection, even of liking, as if they were—financiers. People will imagine you are sentimental—a dreadful thing. It went out of fashion with other early Victorian customs."

"You preach a cynic's doctrine," returned Harry, purposely imitating his uncle's manner.

"To attain a reputation for wit, practise satire—it is a splendid recipe. No one quite understands what you mean, and everyone laughs at once for fear of being considered dense—or in case the joke should turn against themselves."

"You are as bad as Socrates."

Lord D'Enville laughed. "It is just as easy to be wise as witty—on the above plan."

"And you recommend me to follow it?"

His uncle took his arm. "The younger one begins to see the gingerbread underneath the gilt the better," he answered more seriously. "Disillusion is one of the ordinations of nature; like cutting teeth, it must be got over. Cultivate a pessimistic outlook and you will not get disappointed. It is almost criminal to be sanguine—the height of foolishness, at any rate. That is why I wanted you to return to Eton this half and taste the joys of notoriety. Nothing could be worse for some boys, but I have a notion you may learn that the ice of pleasure, to skate on which youth fancies is the acme of delight, is not very thick, and lets one through rather easily into deuced cold water."

They reached Mr. Gibson's house as Lord D'Enville concluded, and he went into the private entrance to call on the master. The latter was overwhelmed with happiness at receiving his visitor. He derived a harmless and intense pleasure from the society of the aristocracy, and his house was, he rather prided himself, held in well-deserved favour by the most exclusive section of the nobility when seeking a thoroughly reliable tutelage for their sons.

"My dear fellow," he observed with the utmost cordiality, "it is indeed a pleasure to set eyes upon you. We had all given you up as hopeless long ago. Why, only the other day Lord Mulford was saying what a pity it is you shut yourself up so—hermit-wise," he ended smoothly.

"Very good of him," replied the other, "but I

want to have a word or two with you about my nephew."

"Oh, certainly, certainly—of course, it is a little—shall I say delicate?—for him, under the circumstances. But, naturally, in a place like this, he meets with the kindest consideration."

"Possibly! For myself, I hope he *doesn't*." Mr. Gibson raised his eyebrows and laughed a trifle uncertainly as his guest said this. "But I shall be obliged if you will let me know occasionally if you think he is worrying too much—or inclined to become morose."

"My dear D'Enville, most certainly. I shall be only too happy. A terribly sad affair, altogether; I was——"

Lord D'Enville interrupted quietly:

"On the contrary, I consider it, in many ways, an excellent thing—for Harry's sake."

"You don't say so? Dear me!" exclaimed the master in great bewilderment. He was beginning to feel rather at sea.

Lord D'Enville departed almost immediately to catch a train. He would not have any refreshment, and Mr. Gibson found him singularly unresponsive. He remarked to his wife later on that there must be some strain of eccentricity in the D'Enville blood.

"A great pity," he added complacently, with reference to Lord D'Enville; "he used to be such a charming, delightful fellow. No doubt he has grown self-centred living alone—such a mistake. Let us hope the boy will escape the family tendency to the 'bizarre.'"

Meanwhile the "boy" was composing a letter which cost him many a pang. Not once or twice

did he begin afresh. Indeed, one sheet had a suspicious blot upon it which necessitated its abandonment.

Finally he achieved the following :

" MY DEAR MOTHER,

" I have carefully considered what we talked about yesterday. Under the circumstances I can see only one course to pursue. I won't have anything to do with Mr. Leonardson—awfully sorry to give you pain. You must choose between him and me. Please don't think I am not serious, mother darling. I have only decided this after a lot of thought.

" Your loving son,

" HARRY."

He dared not read it through, but stuck it hastily into an envelope, addressed and stamped it, and took it out to post straight away, lest his resolution should break down.

CHAPTER XIX

When Mrs. D'Enville received this letter her first impulse was to rush down to her son and agree to anything he asked. The pathos of it wrung her heart. Poor child, she thought, how he must have suffered to write this. It was almost like a stab to receive these cold, stilted sentences in place of the eager, boyish rigmaroles, grown more sedate of late, she hoarded up so carefully. Then she began to reflect, and told herself she was allowing her feelings to run away with her. There was a limit, and Harry was too young to understand. She sat down and answered his appeal in the best way—as she thought. A bright letter, chaffing him easily on his solemnity—on the dismay he inspired in his poor little mother's mind. She declined to take him seriously, and wound up by saying she would come down again soon and they could have a good talk over it. However, she found it difficult—as Harry had done—to hit off the exact note she wished to strike.

Two days afterwards she received an answer to her own.

“DEAR MOTHER,

“Please do not come and see me unless you are prepared to do what I wish.

“Your affec. son,

“HARRY.”

So he was really in earnest! Poor Mrs. D'Enville, she was torn in two directions. However, her self-interest won for the time, and she concluded that Harry would gradually get over this extraordinary notion of his. Meanwhile she must make up her mind to think as little of him as possible. It was uncommonly hard work and demanded a constant attention to business—or pleasure. She flung herself into every possible amusement open to her. It was necessary to refrain from too frequent appearances in public while the case was fresh in people's minds and until the decree was made absolute. However, she contrived to fill up her time adequately.

Leonardson was always at hand now. He had begun to send her presents—choice flowers enough to fill her flat; fruits out of season and only to be bought at fabulous prices; cases of jewellery for her to choose from. These last she declined to accept—partly from an unwillingness to commit herself too irrevocably till the last moment, partly from a knowledge that it would not be wise to do anything to call extra attention on herself. However, she went to his house when he entertained, and accompanied him to the theatre with other people. He was very intimate with the Mulfords now; they were entirely pleased with him—at least, Lord Mulford was, and his wife invariably fell in with his wishes when she could. She found it the surest means of getting her own way on important occasions.

Everywhere the financier was meeting with success greater even than he had foreseen.

The papers realised that a new figure had arisen who would provide splendid copy. His town house

became celebrated. The pictures, the furniture, the *objets d'art*, were written of in the most fulsome strain. His yacht, his motors, his Scotch castle, afforded unrivalled material. He graciously permitted himself to say a few words to favoured representatives of select journals, and his photograph became a feature of society gossip. London grew quite excited over him, and the exclusive section speedily satisfied themselves that he was an acquisition—sponsored as he was by the Mulfords.

Lord Mulford spared no effort to push forward the man who had put him on the road to the improvement of his fortunes—incidentally taking a very fair half of the same for himself—on a scale which would enable him to keep up the title not only sufficiently, but magnificently, and, further, rear and shoot as many high pheasants as his soul desired.

And Leonardson was clever enough not to make himself cheap. He preserved a reticence, a difficulty of approach, which served him better than the most strenuous affability could have done. He acquired a reputation for independence, and people who might have been unable to refrain from snubbing him, had he seemed pushing, became anxious to know him directly they discovered he intended to give no openings for being slighted.

When he indicated his willingness to stand for a seat in Parliament in the Conservative interest he was hailed with acclamation as a future Chancellor of the Exchequer. In fine, he was well on the road to climb as high in his new sphere of activities as in the old.

He was sufficiently genial to get on with men, and had always been quick to notice and emulate the

ways of those above him in rank, so that he very rapidly overcame any deficiencies which remained. Really nice women wondered if he would ring true—but the generality accepted him at the popular estimate, and many a mother began to weave webs.

Such being his position Mrs. D'Enville was, naturally enough, the more inclined to think many times before throwing away such a chance, even if she could—of which she began to have her doubts.

"There is no hurry, I am not free yet," she said to Lady Mulford one day as they were driving in the Park.

Leonardson had just passed, walking briskly with a newly acquired air of modest distinction which undoubtedly became him. He was perfectly dressed, and his strong lithe figure showed at its best. He noticed them at once, and bowed with most marked deference. With his hat off and the sun shining on his glossy black hair, he made a not unattractive picture. It struck Mrs. D'Enville that no woman need be ashamed of his appearance.

"Mulford is quite crazy over him—I sometimes think he has an idea he might do for Florrie;" the speaker smiled. "Men are apt to fancy themselves as match-makers."

"Why, he is old enough to be her father!" exclaimed Mrs. D'Enville with some indignation—chiefly due to the fact that she had a vague desire Florence Kirby and Harry might suit one another.

"Florrie will most certainly make her own selection," that young lady's mother declared. "I should have as much say in it as—the kitchenmaid; while as for her father—she would snap her fingers at him, and tell him not to interfere in what he didn't understand, and confine himself to his game-keeping."

"I can quite believe it," responded the other; "but suppose she elected to fall in love with him?"

"I pray Heaven she has too much self-respect, too sound a heart," exclaimed Lady Mulford with fervour, moved to speak her thought freely. "He is only, when all is said and done, a rich nobody, twenty-seven years older than herself. The extra millions don't alter facts."

"They cover them up very nicely," rejoined Mrs. D'Enville.

"Don't even joke about it," Lady Mulford said, in a grave voice. "To tell you the truth, Mr. Leonardson impresses me disagreeably in some undefined way. I can't say what there is about him exactly, but it is almost as though a shadow crosses the sun when he appears."

"I know," muttered her companion, almost inaudibly.

"I admit his force and fascination and all that—but there is something, and I am not the only person who is sensible of it."

"I know," came again, in a low whisper.

"It might be possible to buy even his money—to reverse the usual procedure—too dear."

Maie D'Enville thought of Harry—that would be a high price, but the boy was passing through a phase. He had taken a dislike to Leonardson—not without reason. When he found his mother was actually married—or going to be—he would relent.

"What does Harry think of him?" asked Lady Mulford suddenly, as though she read the other's mind.

"Oh, Harry—he is like you—at present," was the answer.

"It would be a pity if they didn't get on."

"Oh, don't croak, Connie," cried Mrs. D'Enville in some agitation. "It is all very well for you to talk, with a solid wall behind you—as I have often told you. Think what it would mean for the boy. There is nothing he might not have, no height he might not aspire to. You know what money is to-day."

"It is like a good many other things, you can have too much of it. I shudder to think of the number of innocent pheasants Mulford will bring up and slaughter annually when his coalfields mature—or whatever they call it."

"But I am not the sort to live alone—and I love luxury;" her voice grew reflective. "I wonder if one can pay too heavily for wealth and power?"

"All I can say is, my dear, that I sincerely trust you won't discover the fact too late." She patted her friend's hand kindly. "I know your position is cruel, I know how the world treats the woman. I know I am talking from a firm rock to some one battling out in the waters, but I do say—consider well before you catch hold of the rope that man throws to you."

"We always seem to get on some terribly solemn subject nowadays," declared Mrs. D'Enville. "Let's go and drive down Park Lane, and see if there is a vacant South African millionaire's villa for me to give you as a birthday present when I am Mrs. Leonardson." She laughed recklessly. "A short life and a merry one, Connie. Divorcées can't be choosers."

"Here is a quiet seat, Maie," said Leonardson in a masterful tone.

She sat down immediately. She had got into the habit of obeying him lately ; it saved trouble. It was the evening of this same day, and she had gone to a musical "at-home,"—to meet him. They were in a corner of a small room, out of sight behind a screen of palms and flowers.

He seated himself by her.

"When are we going down to Eton to see that boy of yours ?" he asked. As a matter of fact, he desired to come to a better understanding with Harry—he half suspected antagonism.

"Oh, I don't know ; we can settle a day sometime."

"You don't seem very keen about it ?"

"I was there the other day." She could not bring herself to tell him of her disagreement with Harry. Several times she had tried, but it stuck in her throat.

"I have not seen him for a long time. You want me to, don't you ?"

"Of course I do. I am most anxious for you to be friends."

"I shall never quarrel with anyone you are fond of, Maic."

She had ceased to object to his use of her christian name. What was the good ?

"Do you know," he went on, "you are a thousand times more beautiful than ever." A peculiar warmth of expression crept into his voice, like a dry fire, and the effect was not altogether pleasing.

She laughed and made a motion to rise. He put his hand on her arm.

"You have been free more than a month now."

"Free ?—only provisionally."

"Actually—in less than five more."

"I suppose so," she answered listlessly.

Suddenly she turned with more animation.

"So I am more than a pawn in your game?"

"What do you mean?" he asked, puzzled by her tone.

"How much do you propose to pay—my late husband, altogether?"

His eyes narrowed a little.

"So he told you?"

"No," she replied, trying to speak indifferently.

"How do you know, then? I did not intend you should—until I myself informed you."

"There are such things as coincidences, which may even, it appears, upset *your* calculations."

"And this particular one?"

"Has resulted in Harry becoming your—enemy, I am afraid."

"Tell me."

She repeated the substance of Harry's experience at the theatre. Leonardson listened impassively to the end. Then he remarked:

"Yes, I did not foresee that."

His companion looked at him queerly.

"You will have to make it up with him. That is quite certain. At present he is prejudiced—to put it mildly—against you."

"And that matters?"

Mrs. D'Enville raised her head from the contemplation of the carpet.

"Yes, it does. There is no use blinking facts. I think we understand one another, Mr. Leonardson. You have arranged your net well—we are all in the meshes. I acknowledge your cleverness and I admit your power. It is too late for me to go back, and you have shown me a path on which I might

do worse than set my foot. Do not mistake me, though. I must have Harry's approval——"

She paused through the intensity of her emotion.

Leonardson regarded her with admiration while she was speaking. When she hesitated he put in, eagerly :

"I would make you forget him, and everything."

"No, no," she answered in a low voice, quivering with feeling ; "I must have Harry."

"I must come first." He looked at her greedily. Who was this boy to stand in his way, even to this degree ?

She sighed again almost wearily. It seemed hopeless to struggle against fate ; the sudden outbreak had left her as suddenly depressed and weak. Leonardson bent towards her, putting his left hand on her arm, and turned her face to him with his right. His own face was flushed, above even its normal degree, and a fierce light shone in his eyes.

Then, slowly, he kissed her. She stayed still, fascinated. When it was done she shivered, and shook herself as though waking from sleep. Then she got up and walked away, her brain whirling. She was blindly angry, yet frightened and subdued. The man appealed to the worst in her, and she resented it, as though he had been her footman. But—she had not the strength to resist him.

CHAPTER XX

Harry was playing for the school at cricket for the first time. He had been told a day or two before by the Captain of the Eleven that his services would be in request for the next school match. This honour raised his spirits and brightened his outlook on life to some degree, for he had been passing through a somewhat miserable period. He began by imagining, generally with little enough reason, that his family trouble was the subject of universal interest to everybody at Eton, and he had gradually allowed himself to grow morbid on the point. Consequently his companions found him dull—unlike himself; and—partly from an idea that he might not care for company, partly as the result of his reserve—they left him a good deal to himself.

He worked carelessly and got into some trouble there, but cricket was always a refuge from his thoughts. Almost all his spare time could be given to it—either practising at nets or actually playing—and he forgot his worries in the exercise and interest of the game.

Thanks to the coaching at Arton, he started right away playing in his best form, and soon came to be regarded as a likely candidate for the team. He made a big score in one of the test games, and duly

received his reward—by being selected for this match.

Eton batted first, and Harry, going in sixth, was last out for fifty-four of a total of two hundred and twenty. Naturally enough, he was considerably elated at this performance; everyone congratulated him, and, for the nonce, he trod on air. Then his turn came to field, and, as he left the pavilion, he caught sight of his mother standing at the end of the ring of spectators, some thirty yards away. His heart came into his mouth. His first impulse was to run up to her and greet her as usual—then he remembered. He must be firm—let her see he was in earnest.

She watched anxiously, wistfully, and saw his expression change. His mouth and jaw set rigidly. Without another glance he stalked out with the others.

But his day was spoilt. The trouble was back again, ten times worse than before. He fielded brilliantly, the chance of exerting every muscle gave him temporary relief, and he let nothing go by. Every other over he was out in the deep, and won frequent applause by saving apparently certain boundaries; the effort acted as a safety-valve to his feelings.

The visitors happened not to be a particularly strong batting side, and were out in about two hours for a hundred and forty all told, so that Eton won comfortably by eighty runs on the first innings.

Harry dreaded going back to the pavilion. He saw, without looking, that his mother was still there and Kirby with her. Still, it had to be faced. Then it struck him, so that he wondered he had not thought of it before, that she might have come

to say she would give up Leonardson. Immediately he was all eagerness to meet her. He hurried into his blazer and almost ran till he was right up to her. Then something in her face told him she was not changed, and he stopped in dismay.

"Well, Harry," she called out in a would-be cheerful voice, "you do not seem particularly delighted to see me."

As Kirby was with them and there were people standing round, he could do nothing but reply:

"Of course I am, mother. How are you?"

They exchanged a few sentences, and then, as it was close on six o'clock, Kirby had to go off to answer his name at "absence," the school call-over. Harry and his mother began to walk round the ground. The match was being played in "Upper Club," the old ground where so many famous men, both in cricket and other spheres, have played for almost centuries—the new ground known as "Agar's Plough" not having quite usurped the place of the beautiful old "playing fields" of Eton.

They passed down the side next to the "Fellows' Pond" and on among the old elms, giants in years and circumference, till they arrived at the peaceful reach of the Thames which flows gently past "Fellows' Eyot." Not a word had they spoken, Mrs. D'Enville being determined that Harry should be the first to break the silence which had supervened when Kirby left them.

"Why did you come?" he demanded at last.

She was watching him with a full heart, thinking how boyish and handsome he looked in his light-grey flannels, with the top button of his shirt undone, and his blue and black striped blazer open. Only the determination on his face surprised her.

"Harry, I wanted to see you."

"Have you come to say you agree to give up that man?"

He stared straight in front of him, his eyes fixed on vacancy. She could have laughed at the tragic humour of the situation, only her heart was too sore. Her son coldly dictating the terms on which he would consent to resume amicable relations!

"My dearest boy, you must allow me to have a mind of my own," she replied; "you do not——"

He interrupted gravely:

"I have no control over you, mother. You can please yourself."

This was worse than anything she had expected. He was behaving like a quiet, self-possessed man of forty, she thought.

"Don't talk like that, Harry, you hurt me." She saw his face twitch, but the muscles did not relax. Then she slipped her hand in his arm—but he gently disengaged it.

"Harry, suppose I can't do what you want? You don't know everything. I am thinking of you as much as anything."

"Of me?"

"Yes. I have nothing of my own, beyond the settlement of about six hundred a year."

"Do you mean you would marry him for his money?" he demanded in the same cold voice he had used all through this conversation.

"Money is a necessity—but that is not all, of course," she answered hastily. "Anyhow, he is already, or soon will be, one of the richest men in the world."

"I would not touch a penny of his gold. I can earn my own living," he said proudly.

His mother was at a loss. She knew so well, so much better than her poor boy, as she thought, how hard a place the world may be with none of this filthy lucre—which he scoffed at in his ignorance—to grease the wheels. And it *was* for him—to some extent, a great extent—that she contemplated wedding Leonardson.

“But what can you do?” she cried at length, spreading her hands downwards in a hopeless gesture. “You know I would give up anything for you; but, Harry, you are cruelly hard. * You don’t know what you are asking.”

He nearly gave in. He repeated to himself his uncle’s advice, that he must see it through if he once started, before he could brace himself to it, and then he had to clench his teeth.

“Uncle Henry will help me. I shall find something.”

“You don’t mean you won’t see me?” she implored, her eyes searching his face.

“I have not altered my mind,” the boy responded.

He suddenly realised that, after all, she could not see inside him, and he clung despairingly to Lord D’Enville’s words. This was worse than he had ever thought. Still, the last two months had left their mark. The many hours of silent misery could not be forgotten in a moment. Above all, the shock he had received at the theatre had left an indelible impression on his soul. His poor attempt to drown his injured feelings in dissipation had ended so tragically. The whole of the guilt gone in one fell swoop. The fact that his father, whom he always, till then, rather looked up to than otherwise, had been stripped of every honourable attribute at once, and shown up unmistakably in all the evil pettiness

of his nature, gave Harry a blow from which he would never recover. Had he been older or without any steady influence, such as Lord D'Enville's, it might have gone badly with him and turned him the wrong way. As it was, it promised to make a man of him. At any rate, he was radically cured of any desire to repeat his dissipation! The attractions of a night in London were not likely to cause him great temptation in the future.

He peered through the trees at the distant scoring-board. Two wickets were down—he could just distinguish the figures—and he had been told to go in one higher in the list.

"I must go back, mother. I am sorry we cannot agree."

She tried to decide on the best course, but could think of nothing likely to influence this inflexible son of hers.

He commenced to retrace his steps, and, perforce, she followed him.

"Harry," she almost moaned.

"Yes, mother?" He stopped.

"Can't you see I am longing to do what you ask?"

It hurt him terribly that his mother should appeal to him like this. She was as much to him as he was to her, and he badly wanted her back on the old terms of careless, but perfect, understanding.

"Then, why not do it?"

"If it were possible to reconcile it with my reason, my experience, I would. You forget I have known the world for years, that I know Mr. Leonardson far better than you. He may seem unscrupulous, but he is used to other methods than ours—why, you child," she cried out in her emotion, "compared to

some men he is honour himself in his dealings with women—so far as I am concerned, at any rate." She paused for fear her voice should be heard, suddenly realising that she was almost shouting.

"He bribed father to be divorced to let him marry you. He has disgraced us—schemed and planned like a low cad to buy the whole family. He shall not buy me," declared the boy, some of his uncle's remarks recurring to his mind.

"Give me time, Harry," she begged then, impressed by his firmness, and conscious in her inmost heart that she loved him the more for it.

"Promise to have nothing more to do with him."

"You are unreasonable. You ask impossibilities," she answered, striving to harden her heart. Since Harry would not listen to her, she would be compelled, in a greater degree than ever, to depend on herself. "If you cannot treat me as a son should, I shall have to go away—that is all."

He walked on; they were nearly back on the ground, but no one was near at the moment.

"He is a dirty, dishonourable blackguard!" he hissed out. "I will never speak to him if I can help it." Turning quickly, he kissed his mother on both cheeks and then ran off.

"It is him or me," he said.

Mrs. D'Enville returned to London in a dangerous mood—for herself. If Leonardson had seen her that night no doubt he would have found her more amenable than ever before, and she would doubtless have promised anything he desired in her desperation.

But fate so ordained it that he should be called abroad by imperative business for a week. In his tremendous field of operations the guiding hand could not be replaced at once, and, occasionally, he was forced to attend to one of the specially important crises which must occur in all large enterprises.

During those same days Harry chanced to contract a slight chill after getting very hot one evening at the nets and then soaked by a heavy shower. He did not change for some time, and incurred the penalty.

That night he became feverish and could not sleep, so amused himself by putting on a change suit and boots, clambering out of his own window, down a drain-pipe on to the ledge of the window underneath, and thence into the yard in front of his house. This absolutely illegal feat accomplished, he walked calmly down the road. Enterprises of this sort are undertaken purely for the satisfaction of breaking rules, and Harry found an enormous relief in the simple fact that he was parading the street at midnight in defiance of all authority and at the risk of certain expulsion if detected. It suited his mood, however, excellently. He marched solemnly down till he came to the schoolyard, which he examined from the outside, thinking it gloomy and rather weird-looking in the darkness. He could just discern the statue of "pious Henry" in the centre. Not a soul stirred—even a policeman failed to add excitement to the experience by necessitating American-Indian methods of evasion.

Rather bored, he made his way back and climbed, laboriously into his room again.

His expedition bore fruit in an unexpected manner. The next morning he was in a high fever.

Dr. Galt, the solemn and dignified physician who attended Mr. Gibson's pupils, examined him and reported the result to the master. "A serious case," he observed; "the relations should be informed at once. There is cause to fear pneumonia."

"No immediate danger, I trust?" inquired Mr. Gibson, much perturbed. He was fond of Harry—apart from the kudos he would add to the house if he got into the eleven—and, besides, a fatal termination would be undesirable in every way.

"One can never tell," responded the doctor, with the guarded pessimism of his kind. As a matter of fact he was not very positive himself, beyond the fact that the boy was certainly very ill, and it is always wise to be on the safe side. Should young D'Enville recover he would obtain the credit due to such an event. Otherwise—he rehearsed the formula. "I was afraid from the first, my dear sir. A very intractable case. You have my most sincere sympathy."

His manner on these occasions was beyond reproach, conveying the exact shade of respectful condolence, but he sincerely hoped this nice boy would recover and enable him to express—as he greatly preferred doing—his equally tactful congratulations. Meanwhile absolute quiet was essential and no distractions. Had the boy anything on his mind? he asked Mr. Gibson. The latter hummed and hawed, finally allowing that the trouble between his parents was a conceivable cause of depression—though not likely seriously to affect a lad of that age.

"Hum," commented the doctor, non-committally, "it is important he should be kept quiet—no excitement or worries of any kind. Should the case prove, as I fear, to be due to the ravages of the pneumo-coccus," he rubbed his hands together and looked over his spectacles, "it will be advisable to have a second opinion from London."

"Anything you consider necessary, of course, my dear doctor. I will wire to the boy's mother and write to his uncle, Lord D'Enville."

"Ah, quite so—most commendable. I will send a nurse at once—it is a necessity in these cases. And now I must be on my way. We doctors are busy, even among these healthy lads. However, young D'Enville has a sound constitution—we must hope for the best. I will look in again in an hour or so's time to see everything is going along satisfactorily."

He departed with the air of having conferred a favour—which is a valuable asset in his profession.

On his return he pronounced that the symptoms left no doubt that pneumonia had set in, and Mr. Gibson despatched messages to Harry's mother and uncle. He was not surprised to see Mrs. D'Enville in the course of the afternoon. He usually treated all the mothers of his pupils with a ponderous humour which he considered consonant with his own dignity and due to their charming sex, but such a case as this demanded a gravely sympathetic bearing.

"Ah, Mrs. D'Enville," he said, rising graciously to meet her—she had been shown into his study—"this is a sad affair. However, I am glad to assure you there is no danger. Dr. Galt, an eminently trustworthy physician, considers that, with the

strictest quiet and avoidance of all disturbing circumstances, there is little occasion for alarm."

Mrs. D'Enville stared at him anxiously while he was speaking.

"Little occasion?" she echoed.

"Pneumonia must always be a matter for some anxiety," responded Mr. Gibson, "but with the careful nursing he will have, in addition to the most skilful medical treatment, we need anticipate nothing abnormal. Besides," he added, "it must all conduce to a favourable result that Harry will have the benefit of a mother's soothing sympathy at once."

Somewhat to his surprise she turned away with tears in her eyes, and said:

"Pray God he may think so." Then she cried out: "Take me to him—now, immediately."

"My dear Mrs. D'Enville, I assure you there is no reason to distress yourself," he commenced deprecatingly. He feared a scene. Women were such undependable creatures.

"No, no," she broke in, almost wildly; "go and find out if I can see him. Tell the nurse to ask him if he wants me to come."

"But of course. Only let me beg of you to be calm. It is important to keep him as quiet and undisturbed as possible—"

"Please go at once," she said, lifting her hands and pressing the palms together in front of her in her anxiety. "I will be very good."

Mr. Gibson wondered at her emotion, but walked with a dignified step to the door and disappeared on his errand.

Mrs. D'Enville threw herself on a chair, biting

her handkerchief to control her agitation. This summons had frightened her. Suppose Harry died? She rushed down to Eton without stopping to think; she only felt she must see him—be near him. While the master was away she stared vacantly at the clock, her mind racked with a vague foreboding of disaster.

When he returned, his face was grave and a slight frown contracted his brow. He was both puzzled and troubled. She sat up eagerly, eyeing him.

"I sent your message in by the nurse. She informed me your son was in a high state of fever, and must not be disturbed unavoidably. However, since it was his mother, of course she would tell him."

"Yes, yes?"

"She did so, and he— I trust the poor fellow is not delirious— said he would not see you unless you had agreed to his wishes. That," concluded Mr. Gibson, "is all I could make of it."

A blank look spread over her face, and she sank back in the chair.

"I am sorry——" deprecated Mr. Gibson, wondering what the explanation could be.

"Oh, what *am* I to do?" she moaned, disregarding him entirely. This was more than she could bear.

"Are you sure there is no danger?" she demanded.

"Not at present. I understand the crisis will occur in a few days' time."

Mrs. D'Enville got up, staggering a little, so she had to support herself on a chair. She forced a smile.

"Poor Harry! We had a slight disagreement, and no doubt his illness magnifies it. Perhaps just now it may be as well not to fret him. Since I know there is no immediate danger I think it will be best for me to go away quietly. Will you give me the doctor's address, please?"

Mr. Gibson did so, and she went away, after requesting him to give Harry her best love. She could not remain in the house, or even see the nurse. She had made up her mind during the last few days that, despite Harry's opposition, she would accept Leonardson. Was her resolve to break down at the very first time of asking. At any rate, she would wait a day or two.

She found Dr. Galt at home, enjoying his cup of tea. He was not a little astonished at her vague, excited manner, but he perceived that she required reassurance. Therefore he made as light of the case as possible. There was nothing at present to be apprehensive about, he declared, and no doubt the disease would run its normal course, while the chances were all in favour of the patient—an exceptionally healthy boy. She might be certain everything possible would be done. The best medicines were rest and quiet. Of course she had seen him. No? There was no objection, if she did not excite him.

Mrs. D'Egville could not explain. She asked several more questions, learnt that for some days there would be no change, that Dr. Galt would like Sir Gerald Black's opinion, and arranged for the consultation. She gave him her address, and he promised to telephone to her twice a day how Harry progressed. Just as she was leaving she inquired whether mental worry would militate against her

son's recovery. The doctor was surprised, and hoped there was nothing serious of the kind. It always improved a patient's chances if his mind was at ease.

With this last sentence ringing in her ears she took her departure. All the way up to London it beat on her brain. She strove unavailingly to turn her thoughts elsewhere, for she knew it would demand all her power of will to carry through her purpose. That night at dinner — a gay party at the Carlton — she was in brilliant form, witty and vivacious. It was late ere she eventually dared to seek repose. Darkness is no good ally when the will desires to oppose the heart.

CHAPTER XXI

Nearly a week later Lady Mulford found Harry's mother seated in negligée at her old French writing-desk in the boudoir of the flat in North Street. It was half-past ten, and a call at that hour no mean feat to perform in the name of friendship.

In the middle of the season both ladies were naturally up to their eyes in engagements ; though, from the nature of things, they had not met in the mean time. The former's time was fully occupied endeavouring to follow, with some approach to efficient chaperonage the peregrinations of her débutante daughter, Florence. Mrs. DeVille, not yet legally free, was constrained to reserve some measure of privacy, and could not attend any of the big functions which Florence Kirby found so enthralling, even had she been inclined.

With an ache in her head and a worse one in her heart, the poor woman was perusing for the tenth time an epistle from Leonardson, wherein he announced his immediate return to London, and asked, in somewhat peremptory language, for a quiet dinner with her the following evening.

" Good heavens, Connie," she cried with an effort at cheerfulness, as she rose to greet her early visitor, " are you living the simple life in London, or is it an earthquake ? "

Lady Mulford kissed her affectionately. Her good-natured soul was much perturbed. She herself had lately seen much of Leonardson, and liked him well enough for what he was. Her husband continued to enthuse on the subject, for the coal-field project progressed apace. She knew nothing definite of the trouble between Harry and his mother, and, on the whole, had come to regard the probability of Leonardson marrying her friend with equanimity. But this morning she had received a communication which entirely upset her notions.

"I had no idea Harry was so ill, dear," she replied. "Henry D'Enville has written to me from Eton."

"I didn't write," responded the other, passing her hand wearily across her brow. "To tell the truth, this last week I have scarcely known what I am doing."

"But why are you not down there?"

Mrs. D'Enville laughed with a wild note, which almost suggested hysteria.

"I, his mother, am not allowed to see him," she answered.

"What do you mean? Here, sit down, Maria, you are upset." She pressed her gently into a chair. "Tell me about it," she went on in a calm voice, realising her companion was on the verge of breaking down badly.

"He won't have anything to do with me unless I give up my—acquaintance with Howard Leonardson. Then he gets this pneumonia. I am half-crazy with it all, and no one to help."

"You might have come to me."

"I couldn't, Connie. I—I thought I would just wait till Harry got over the crisis. Perhaps he will

see me then. He doesn't understand, poor boy. Listen: Mr. Leonardson has us all in his power—Charles and me, and, through us, Harry. He can ruin us if he likes—oh, heavens! I wish I were dead." She dropped her head back, and stared hopelessly in front of her.

"But I don't follow—why is this?"

"Oh, we owe him simply thousands, and—you know what he is. I cannot resist him," the words came as though involuntarily from her lips, "he is so determined, and he fascinates me, dominates me. If only Harry could get over his dislike it would all be so easy."

Lady Mulford's face grew solemn. Maie D'Enville scarcely seemed in her right mind. Her individuality, her quickness of perception, were gone, and a dazed, helpless expression, such as one sees in a hunted hare or a frightened mouse, made her appear ten years older, at least. Some alleviation must be found, or, at this rate, the strain would knock her up completely very soon.

"I have tried to forget," went on the other—bits of amusement, theatres, motor drives, watching the polo, dinners, suppers, bridge," she rambled on aimlessly, "but it doesn't seem to help much. The doctor says once he is over the crisis he will soon mend, then I can go to see him. Harry doesn't understand how difficult it is for me, or he wouldn't ask it. Poor fellow perhaps he wants me, too. Do you think he does, Connie?" She sat up eagerly, her face alight with this novel idea.

Lady Mulford took her hand.

"Of course he does, Maie. Come, pull yourself together. Did you hear me say I have a letter from your brother-in-law?"

"My brother-in-law? Oh yes, Henry—but he isn't——"

"Never mind, dear. He asked me to see you and tell you——"

"Yes?" cried the mother, as her friend paused.

"That the crisis is imminent." The speaker's voice was very grave now.

"Ah! then he will soon be on the mend," broke in the listener.

"Have you considered what would happen if the crisis turned the wrong way?" Lady Mulford asked gently—her own voice hardly under control. Poor Maie, it was horribly pathetic to see her in this state.

"What? You don't mean to say he might die? The doctor told me yesterday, when he telephoned, that Harry's progress was as good as could be expected."

"Yes, but he has been making the best of it. Harry begged them to tell nothing likely to worry you. As a matter of fact this letter," she held up Lord D'Enville's, "says that he is being kept back by something—some mental trouble—which prevents him making a proper fight. Can you guess what it is?"

Maie D'Enville got up out of her chair. A radiance shone in her eyes which softened them wonderfully. The worn, anxious expression was gone, and Lady Mulford stared at her a moment in amazement. The feeble, vacillating woman was transformed into a quietly determined, if anxious, mother, whose doubt and uncertainty were fled.

Harry had won! the relief from the strain was immeasurable, and her sole idea now was to go to him as quickly as might be and set his mind at rest.

She forgot Leonardson entirely for the time. Harry might be dying—from her fault. Her fault! It must not be. She remembered—as though it were a far-away dream—that someone said he would not have her informed that he was dangerously ill for fear of distressing her. How big—how noble—of him, when he was estranged from her, to think of her and wish to spare her pain! She saw him again as a baby—her own baby—when the world was young, and life still something of a rose-garden to wander in and imagine pleasant fictions—so ruthlessly destroyed since. Charles, her husband, had been a brave and charming prince—once! And only Harry left of it all. He had not disappointed her. She realised that he constituted the sole connecting link between her and a possibility of salvation.

Then Leonardson recurred to her mind. She saw him, as it were, the dark, menacing shadow of a vulture hanging in the infinite, waiting to drop on the carcass beneath directly the breath of life has departed. The breath of life—her son. Should he die she were alone indeed—at the mercy of the first lurking shadow which descended on her helplessness. For the first time—perhaps owing to the effect of the prolonged strain—her mind viewed things from a cleaner, saner standpoint.

She could not wait to reason, the all-engrossing impulse must be obeyed.

"I am going to him now," she declared, "my boy—he shall have his way."

Lady Mulford smiled, and a mist obscured her vision. Her errand was well and happily performed.

Harry opened his eyes and groaned. He was restless and uncomfortable. The fever held him, and his mind wandered at intervals. It was jolly of Uncle Henry to sit with him so much; he was a real good sort. How big the room seemed—then he remembered he had been moved into the private part of the house. When was it? The effort tried his memory too much, so he gave it up. After all it mattered very little.

He wondered who was taking his place in the eleven. Herbert Larking was certain to get in—that was a good thing. Why had he not been to see him to-day? The nurse came in and gave him some muck or other to drink, smoothing his pillow. She seemed a good sort. Then his mind went off on an expedition into space. His father, in the form of a jackal, was prowling about—and Leonardson, like the tiger at the Zoo, only he was a tiger—and his mother, a frightened hind, glancing timidly this way and that as he had seen them when alarmed in the deer forest in Scotland last year, when he had done some stalking for the first time.

By Jove! he would shoot the tiger—with a spasmodic jerk he recovered consciousness again. He wanted his mother. What were they muttering about in the room? They were always muttering. How could a fellow see if the blinds were down? Old Galt was coming, he supposed. He turned a little, and thought he would try and sleep.

Then a hand slipped under his head as he heard the door close. He opened his eyes—surely he was dreaming?

"Mother," he murmured. Then he gave a little struggle, as though to move from her embrace. Her lips were on his forehead.

"It is all right, Harry. I promise," she whispered.

The boy sighed. He did not know if he dreamed or not, but it was a sigh of relief straight from his heart. He snuggled his face towards her, and lay quiet. In a few moments more he was asleep.

"He will do nicely," remarked Sir Gerald Black. "I do not think my services will be required further. I could not leave him in better hands than my colleague's;" he bowed as he uttered the stereotyped phrase. "Perfect quiet and good nursing. Astonishing how well he has passed through the critical phase. Quite remarkable. I anticipate no abnormal developments. Should any occasion arise when my advice is considered desirable, my friend will of course let me know. Good-day, Mrs. D'Enville—may I be permitted to congratulate you on the eminently satisfactory condition of the patient—good-day, Lord D'Enville—most happy if I have been of any slight service." The two doctors bowed themselves out, after receiving the grateful thanks of Harry's mother and uncle.

"Most interesting," remarked the specialist to Dr. Galt, as they descended the stairs. "No doubt the reconciliation with his mother exercised a most beneficial influence—a stimulus no medical science could apply. Ah! strange are the means by which one acquires merit in this world," he muttered under his breath.

"I beg your pardon?" politely interjected the other.

"I was merely reflecting that I had very grave doubts of the issue until the lad's mother arrived," Sir Gerald answered. He was very glad to have

another success to his record, but he knew it was due more to natural than to medical remedies.

Lord D'Enville's face was strangely mild—for him.

"You have chosen wisely, Maie. I congratulate you. Now I have Sir Gerald's instructions to send you to bed at once. We do not want two patients on our hands. You shall see him in the morning, and Mr. Gibson has kindly had a room prepared for you here. I am staying in Windsor."

CHAPTER XXII

The next morning, the patient being definitely out of danger, Mrs. D'Enville went up to town for a few hours to attend to several matters. Having finally, as she considered, crossed the Rubicon, there was no going back, and she must prepare to face the music. But her heart was light, and she regretted nothing. She required some luggage, for one thing ; then she must inform Leonardson, by letter, that she could not see him again—and await results. Lord D'Enville had promised his help. She was agreeably surprised at his reception of her—his kindness to Harry—his thoughtfulness and care generally.

She had been amazed when she learnt he had been at Eton three days—ever since Harry's illness reached a really acute stage. Pondering these recent events, and with the new calm of spirit mirrored in her serene countenance, she inserted her latchkey in the door and entered the flat.

She picked her letters off the table in the hall and moved across into the boudoir. She was examining her correspondence, spreading the letters out to see which she would open first, when she caught sight of one in Leonardson's handwriting. Pushing the door back she made her way across to her desk, tearing the envelope open. What did he want ?

The neat, regular writing acted like a cold douche upon her. A careworn look crept back into her face and she recalled his hold over them with a shiver.

"Good evening," exclaimed the cause of this revulsion of feeling, "I was so absorbed in my thoughts that I did not hear the arrival of their object. Good heavens, Maie, I am not going to eat you!"

This exclamation resulted from her reception of his remark. She had come into the flat unnoticed by the servants—he must have been let in to await her—she had telephoned to say she was coming up to lunch.

Her colour faded, and she seemed about to faint—clutching the edge of her desk to steady herself.

"You!" she gasped.

After all, she had some excuse. It was bad enough to defy him on paper—now she would have to go through with it in person, face to face. She still feared him; he still possessed the power to affect her, and she was weak yet from the long mental strain.

"I returned this morning. They told me you would be home about now, when I called—so I waited." He moved towards her.

"Stay where you are," she panted.

"Why, what on earth is the matter with you?" He halted in sheer bewilderment. Had she gone out of her senses? This was a very different welcome to what he had been looking forward so eagerly.

"You must go—I never want to see you again."

The sentence left her as though each word was expelled by her heart's blood. The tension of her

anxiety the night before, while Harry lay for a few minutes between life and death, could not but leave its mark. Her usual composure and ease of manner were beyond her reach. She felt like a hysterical girl.

Leonardson smiled. This behaviour must be the result of some foolish mistake. He moved towards her again confidently.

"What have I done? You are not angry with me? I have never ceased to think of you—are you displeased?"

"No—not angry or displeased." She stepped quickly behind the desk, thus putting it between them. This action was so obvious that he stopped again, marvelling. His flowers were all about the room, he noticed several little things he had given to her lying about. The truth never stuck him. Why should it?"

"Will you explain?" His voice was commanding now. Anger was commencing to stir in his soul, and his eyes narrowed a trifle.

"There is no need to go into details," she said, her self-possession returning. "I am afraid our—acquaintance must cease."

"Are you mad?" he demanded.

"No—I have made a mistake. I apologise if I have misled you as well."

For some reason she began to experience a sensation of self-reliance. She no longer dreaded his wrath as at the first moment of horror, when she became aware of his presence in her room. She thought of Harry and her promise, and was amazed at her own strength. It was as though Leonardson shrank from fictitious dimensions and resumed the proportions of a human being. Suddenly

she remembered he was a rich nobody, and even a thought of contempt reinforced her courage.

"Think what you are saying." He scowled openly now; rage obtaining the mastery. There was no mistaking her meaning. The slighting tone of her voice, the proud look—all carried conviction of her sincerity.

"I have thought well," she returned.

"Then you propose to dismiss me—*me*—with a word?"

She laughed recklessly—a sudden notion seizing her. The words came from her mouth straight from her heart.

"As I dismiss an impertinent footman."

For a moment she quailed—such fierce anger blazed from his eyes. Had the desk not been between them he would have struck her. But he recovered his self-control almost immediately.

"You are not yourself. What have you been doing?"

"Choosing between good and evil." She was astonished at her own words. Surely it could not be she, Maie D'Enville, the gay, the dissipated butterfly, talking like a Salvation Army lass? But she enjoyed it—her nerves were braced now.

He raised his hand palm upwards, slowly closing in the fingers.

"I hold you like—that," he exclaimed, suiting the action to the words.

"Pooh!" she retorted airily. "You forget yourself, Mr. Leonardson. I do not care a rap for your heroics."

"And you forget that I can ruin you—and I will—you and that damned husband of yours! You cannot play fast and loose with me."

She contrived to smile easily, lightly, in spite of an inward tremor. He really was rather alarming, with his lips drawn back in a sneer and the veins standing out on his forehead, as he hurled the words at her.

"You can do precisely as you please, Mr. Leonardson."

"And if I please to beggar you? Come, Maie——"

"Mrs. D'Enville," she broke in.

"Are you wise to defy me? Remember, there are more than yourself to suffer. That son of yours, for instance—he will be prouder of you than ever."

"I think he will," she answered, with an expression on her face that puzzled him.

He dropped his eyes for a moment, and she took the opportunity to slip from behind the desk and up to the bell. The movement was made so rapidly that it was over as he realised her change of position.

"Before you go, Mr. Leonardson, I would like to repeat that I regret having misled you—if I did. I—have not known my own mind till—yesterday."

"Ladies have the reputation of a capacity for altering what they are pleased to term their minds," he sneered. "I advise you to think again. I will give you till this evening. Unless I hear from you by then that this folly is past, you will live to rue the day you defied me. When you are destitute, you may be glad of my protection—without my name." His fury broke out afresh, for this woman was very desirable in his eyes, and he was not accustomed to be thwarted.

She pressed the bell without answering, but her eyes glittered, though her features remained calm.

When the man came in, she said quietly :

" Show Mr. Leonardson out, please, James."

" I will give you till to-night," he muttered, with a glance from his dark eye which sent a cold shiver down her back. His face was working with baffled rage, and he spoke with difficulty.

When the door closed behind the financier, who represented to her the embodiment of worldly success, of money and the power money brings, she fell into a chair and burst into hysterical sobs.

" Oh, Harry, are you satisfied now ? " she moaned over and over again.

The price was heavy, and she did not undervalue it. What lay in front of her she could not conjecture. But her conscience was at ease, though her heart might be heavy and her mind distracted. Many people would have been justly astonished could they have been permitted a glimpse of her then. Her resolution had sustained her just so long as the interview lasted—her nerve gave way, like a violin-string when the peg which holds it taut is suddenly loosened, directly Leonardson was out of her sight and the necessity of courage was no longer pressing.

Leonardson's mood was as black as his looks when he found himself outside in the road. This was the first check he had received for a long time, and from a quarter he least expected. Proceeding direct to her flat on his return from the Continent, with a pleasantly eager anticipation of seeing her again, he had been shown in by an obsequious servant—who was well aware of the progress of his suit, and consequently anxious to please—to await her arrival. He had lost his temper, while she had not. This added to his wrath, and he began to hate her, or to

foresee that he easily might. There was no room or capacity in his nature for unselfish love. Maie D'Enville pleased his senses and suited his requirements. The combination satisfied his standard for judging wives. But this opposition, while infuriating him, at the same time aggravated both his passion for her and his desire to make her suffer should she defy him.

She should have her chance, he told himself; on her be the blame if she had not the sense to take it.

Leonardson, since we last met him, had fallen a victim to that complaint vulgarly denominated as "swelled head." This very night his friend and admirer, Baroness Metsor, was to entertain a select and distinguished company to a dinner and "At Home," where he was the *pièce de résistance*. The Mulfords' interest had borne fruit in other directions, and he was already sought after by personages whose position and importance rendered their advances highly gratifying to his self-esteem. His hospitality had been accepted by men whose names were famous beyond England, and he had received an intimation that his art treasures were an object of interested curiosity to an even higher circle.

It suddenly was borne in upon him that he might do better than marry a woman who, after all, was besmirched. This was a new thought, bred of his offended conceit. Let her beware; he would show her that no one living might trifle with Howard Leonardson. Thus pleasantly communing with himself he repaired to the City to wind up the business which had taken him abroad.

Mrs. D'Enville's face showed signs of the conflict of the morning when she reached Mr. Gibson's house again about six o'clock.

She sat with Harry till dinner, which she and Lord D'Enville took with the master, and afterwards disburdened her mind to her brother-in-law.

Since the day before, her opinion of Lord D'Enville had undergone a considerable modification. In former days she had liked him, but considered him rather slow and dull. Now, for some reason she did not stop to analyse, his presence acted as a sedative and stimulant combined.

She experienced a sensation of safety when with him. He seemed so calm and practical, a rock on which she could stand against her tribulations.

It was an immense relief to tell him her tale of folly, and the sympathetic gravity of his manner alone gave her comfort, which was badly needed.

"What is to be done, Henry?" she asked at length.

"You owe him three thousand pounds?"

"Owe him—if you put it that way. It was supposed to be payment for services rendered. Charles was fully aware of it—but that hardly helps."

"No—we must consider the money as owing. It must be paid."

"But how?" she interjected.

"I will settle it. You must be quit of this man. He must have no hold on you."

"Oh!" she cried, keenly touched by his generosity and the manner in which he spoke—as though it were an insignificant detail.

"Have you considered what you are going to do yourself?"

"I—I don't know," she hesitated; "go on in the usual way, I suppose."

"I rather doubt whether ~~our~~ income will run to it—we shall see."

A bewildered look spread over her face. She had not given two thoughts of the money side of the case since she saw Leonardson.

Lord D'Enville resumed.

"It occurs to me that Mr. Leonardson will have some little to say in the matter. I will write to him, enclosing the cheque—I have a cheque-book with me on Harry's account—and I will inform him that you desire him to understand finally that your acquaintance is at an end. Is that right?"

"Oh, will you? Thank you—it is good of you," she answered, overcome at the free-~~vidence~~ evidence of consideration. "I am so tired of it all, Harry. You can't conceive how glad I am, how thankful to make it up with Harry. I feel a different person. It needed something of the kind for me to realise there are better things than just amusing one's self and having plenty of money. I had forgotten lately."

"I think ~~we~~ are all apt to forget," he responded with a grave smile. "After all, though, it is a question who has the best of it—the humming-birds who sip the honey of life for amusement, or the bees who collect it for a living. I gave up the attempt to do either."

"What is the honey?" she asked.

"What each individual chooses to select," he replied whimsically. "In my case it was happiness; in Mr. Leonardson's—gold, in Harry's—what shall we say?—a hundred in the Eton and Harrow match—for the moment. I fancy the dilettante humming-birds score, on the whole. It is seldom wise to take

anything seriously. One generally regrets it in the long run."

"I don't agree with you," she said—his words had sufficed to turn the conversation from the subject of thanks, which he was anxious to avoid. "I can speak for a humming-bird, and some of them would give all the sips in the world for one good long draught, even if they died after it. One grows tired of sipping, and takes to long drinks, eventually to excess, from sheer boredom."

Lord D'Enville got up. "Now I will be off and write this letter, instead of talking nonsense. I want our estimable friend to receive it as soon as possible."

They said good-night and Maie D'Enville retired to her room in a more peaceful frame of mind than for many a weary day. Whether she would regret in the future or not, at present the sole sentiment which possessed her was thankfulness. Harry on the road to recovery and reconciled to her; Leonardson's growing ascendancy over her mind and body, which she knew for evil, finally cast off, and Henry D'Enville to back her up. The latter might be eccentric, but he inspired her with confidence. She felt so calm and happy that she fell asleep almost at once, which was likewise a novel experience in these days.

It was two days later, when Harry was visibly and rapidly picking up strength and throwing off the disease, that Charles D'Enville arose from a Board Meeting of the Klangor Mine in a state of bewildered dismay. Their chairman had announced briefly that operations would be postponed indefinitely, just at the very moment when everything was ripe for commencing.

Leonardson asked him to come into the secre-

tary's room for a private talk, and he followed him with all sorts of uneasy speculations as to his meanings.

His friend and ally shut the door. Charles D'Enville could make nothing of his expression. The financier was at home here, and master of the situation. Inscrutable and impassive, he prepared to taste the preliminary flavour of his revenge. It was immaterial that Charles D'Enville had done his best—he was mixed up in the affair, and he was in no case to resist. A tool that had blundered, Leonardson reminded himself.

"You want to see me?" asked the tool. "What is this delay caused by? I thought everything was ready, that crushing operations would start immediately—this week, was it not?"

Leonardson allowed a grim smile to curl his lip.

"I am the immediate cause of the delay," he said shortly.

"What?"

"I am afraid you will draw no dividends this year, or next, or the year after, from Klangor;" a sneering smile added grace to the words.

Charles D'Enville gaped—his jaw dropping, and Leonardson rolled the first sweets of vengeance on his palate.

"It may interest you to know also that the 'Ubique' will shortly be going into liquidation."

"You are joking," muttered the other.

"The new mortgages on Mitchet will be foreclosed."

This was more than Charles D'Enville could stand. He pulled himself together and assumed his lightest, easiest manner.

"My dear Leonardson," he began, "if it amuses you to be mysterious, I find it distinctly tedious."

The other fixed his eye on his victim.

"The late Mrs. D'Enville has declined my further acquaintance. You will recollect that our bargain included a provision that she should—take a rather different view of my attentions."

"Really, you do not propose to hold me responsible for the vagaries of a woman's whims?" asked the other, with an interrogative lift of the eyebrows.

Leonardson was not deriving so much satisfaction from the interview as he had hoped for. He expected D'Enville to cringe and fawn, and pray for mercy—as others of his victims had done. His error arose from his limited experience of people of breeding. Whatever Charles D'Enville might be, unscrupulous, mean, selfish, he had the instincts of his kind, and did not lack animal courage. It was not that he derived less vexation of spirit from the prospect of the bankruptcy he perceived before him, but he still possessed that command over his feelings which controls any outward sign of the same before an inferior. The value of such a heritage may be questioned, but it is useful on occasion.

"It is a business transaction, Mr. D'Enville. Since your goods are not up to the guarantee I decline to pay for them."

"The devil you do," remarked the other amiably. "I perceive I did not err in my original estimate of you."

Leonardson was taken aback. His quondam accomplice's manner rather nonplussed him, and for a moment he forgot himself.

"Take care," he threatened. "You forget I have a certain acknowledgment of yours——"

"I blame myself entirely," Charles D'Enville interrupted with an air of easy arrogance, "for associating with a person of your antecedents. A fellow's judgment becomes warped in this atmosphere. The price I have to pay for the pleasure of learning what a delightful person you really are cannot be called excessive."

He took up his hat and bowed gracefully to the astonished Leonardson, adding as he opened the door:

"You require regilding at the corners. I am afraid rather a thick coat—it wears off."

With that he departed, carrying the honours of the encounter with him. It required several years of adulation from the great man's admiring friends among the aristocracy to wipe away all memory of the manner in which this fool—as he considered him—had behaved in the hour of his financial ruin. Leonardson smarted as though rasped by a file on a raw wound. The process of smashing his victim afforded him a surprisingly limited amount of relief, but he carried it out with his usual thoroughness, and a vindictive malice in the indulgence of which he found some slight salve for injured vanity. Both husband and wife had taken a distinctly perceptible volume of wind from his sail just when his ship seemed on the point of creating a record for speediness.

CHAPTER XXIII

Harry learnt the particulars of his mother's break with Leonardson during his convalescence, and the two grew very near together, nearer than ever in the old days. He realised to a great extent what she had resigned for him, and treated her with a tenderness marked with greater respect than formerly, while she gave free play to a love which was more than ever concentrated on him.

"You shan't regret it, mother," he said on the day they moved him from Eton to go to the seaside for a change. "We may be badly off, but it won't matter, will it?"

"You don't mind leaving Eton?" she asked.

"Not a scrap," he replied bravely.

"And giving up the Guards?"

"There are plenty of other things one can do," he declared. "Uncle Henry is keeping his eyes open, and it is only a question of time. That swine must feel pretty well sold to have all his fine plans knocked on the head so thoroughly."

"It has been hard for us all;" Mrs. D'Enville's voice reflected the emotion she felt. "I am sorry for—your father."

"No need to worry about him," Harry returned with attempted cheerfulness. "Charles D'Enville

will come through with his flag still flying. Ask Uncle Harry."

"It will be a little torn, I fear;" she smiled—rather mournfully—at his metaphor and the way he spoke of his father.

"He comes worst out of it, anyhow," said Harry. "Leonardson fairly had him on toast, and he will hate being hard up. You know, mother, I really look on him as one would a stranger now. Since that night"—he paused reflectively. "I understand why our home was a little lacking in 'homogeneity.'"

The pun was necessary to mask his feelings.

She embraced him tenderly. "It won't be any longer, Harry."

"Rather not," he affirmed, then continued in a voice moved with sympathy and affection for her: "I will try and repay you for all you have given up for me. I didn't understand before what it meant for you. Six hundred a year is not a vast income."

"You are worth more than the difference between that and—what I might have had."

It came into Harry's mind to add "as Mrs. Leonardson," but he saw she was deeply touched, and this part of the subject was too recent and unpleasant for chaff.

"Did Mr. Brabourne think that—father would save anything for himself?"

"When the bankruptcy proceedings are completed he will be in a better position to say—but not much, anyhow."

"Men like Leonardson are accustomed to that kind of job," observed Harry. "I expect Charles D'Enville will make a blob against *his* bowling right enough."

His mother laughed. She was relieved that he could take it in this way. Such philosophy as is learned in the pleasure-grounds of the world, at any rate, discovers the secret of not crying over spilt milk.

"It would reflect more credit on his brains than his character if he didn't," she declared in her old manner

Harry did not grasp this remark for a moment, then, when it dawned on him, he said :

"I suppose everyone has good points."

"You dear boy—but he has many excellent qualities, only they never fitted into my bad ones."

She was surprised herself at the calm, almost indifferent view she could take of the recent trouble—now that it was past. A change had come over her whole nature. The Mrs. D'Enville of the last nineteen years had bent in the stress of the storm—as a tree may bend in the wind—and the erstwhile slim but upright stem would never entirely recover its elasticity and straighten again. Harry himself observed that she looked older. In truth, the former continuous straining after excitement had been replaced by a repose of spirit, the echo of which could be discerned in the quieter manner, and a reserved—almost grave—expression which became her remarkably well.

Harry suddenly caught a lighter gleam in her hair as she turned to the window of their sitting-room.

"You *are* becoming grey, old girl," he said, without thinking. But she did not appear to resent the implication as she smiled back at him. Her voice was mild and her face tranquil when she answered.

"I am not sorry, Harry. It will be a convincing reminder of a lesson I have been learning lately—which I do not wish to forget."

Lord D'Enville came into the room then. Well-dressed, with his beard trimmed and his hair cut, he appeared very different from the somewhat untidy figure he was wont to cut at home. Harry felt both grateful and honoured by his uncle's thought for him. Since his illness no father could have been more considerate. He had insisted on bringing them down to-day to be certain they were comfortable and well looked after in their lodgings. Nothing was too good for Harry.

The boy's conduct had appealed to him tremendously, and all the affection in his embittered soul, which was not absorbed by his two boys, centred on this nephew, who had proved so extraordinary a contrast to his father.

He had a carriage outside to take them for a drive before returning to town, where he would stay a day or two longer to arrange the final details connected with their money affairs. It was known now that there would be nothing beyond the marriage settlement for Mrs. D'Enville and Harry.

Mrs. D'Enville excused herself—she would lie down and then write some letters which must be attended to—so Harry and his uncle went alone.

"You will have to look after that mother of yours now you have got her," he remarked a little later, as they were driving along through the warm air.

They had left the limits of the town, and the carriage was passing a lovely bit of country. On the

left lay the Channel, dotted with multifarious vessels, from the majestic liner steaming steadily westward far out from land, to the small rowing-boat which carried a load of trippers just under the cliff below them. The road wound upwards, through slightly ragged trees whose foliage was affected by the moist salt air, till it reached the rolling downs, which spread as far as the eye could reach. Harry breathed deep of the strong life-giving air, and looked round with a new glow of health already in his cheeks.

"She is rather precious," he answered.

"It is a good thing the income from the marriage settlement was definitely made over to her use when the case was concluded—otherwise things would be serious from a financial point of view. I told Mr. Brabourne to insist on it."

"You did?"

"Yes, I rather anticipated this sort of result—only it is even better than I foresaw."

Harry looked his curiosity.

"I am not in the least sorry you are hard up," continued his uncle; "your mother has just enough to live on——"

"Thanks to you," interjected Harry, thinking of the money Lord D'Enville had paid Leonardson to clear her

"That is nothing. What I mean is, I am glad you will have to work for your living. You are perfectly sound, your abilities are up to the average, according to Mr. Gibson, and I certainly do not propose to support you in idleness and luxury." He glanced at Harry with a kindliness which gave a special significance to his words.

The boy laughed. "I see," he said.

Lord D'Enville joined in his nephew's merriment.

"I look upon it all as a godsend. You would have developed into a most delightful man of the world if you had gone into the Guards. Everybody would have liked you, and—that is all. Whereas now, I have hopes you will rest content with becoming a simple—'man.' I have experienced the pleasures of society in my time—they are sweet to the palate, but lie heavy on the stomach. When we come to inquire into the case we discover the latter to be an important organ, and the former liable to become vitiated, and deceive us to our hurt."

"So that it is clearly necessary to study the important organ," Harry remarked thoughtfully.

"Even at the expense of a little flavouring," his uncle resumed. "Plain food may grow monotonous, but at worst it does no harm which would not be accentuated by rich dishes. The change of diet will do your mother good, for one, or I am much mistaken. As for you, it is a dispensation of Providence that you should have to begin on the easily digested form of nourishment."

"If one can get it to digest," said Harry.

"Being a D'Enville, you will contrive to collect some crumbs somewhere." For a short time they drove on in silence.

"How about father?" asked Harry suddenly. He had not found an opportunity of speaking to his uncle on this topic before, and he expended considerable speculation as to what was really likely to befall his parent. He assumed that he would probably emerge more or less successfully from the ordeal by official receiver.

"My brother Charles," replied Lord D'Enville, "has always possessed a faculty usually attributed

to the cat. From what height he may fall he can be trusted to land on his feet. At any rate, his career up to the present has borne out this theory. It is in the family, as I just now implied."

"Yes?" muttered Harry, as the speaker paused

"I am fond of Charles, you know, Harry. It is, unfortunately, not possible for me to meet him since the incident of the cheque. Probably this may surprise you, but I scarcely believe he is to be held entirely responsible. His moral sense is non-existent, its place being taken by a praiseworthy aversion to being found out. I am happy to think he has not handed on this weakness to you—but, as I was saying, one does not blame a man for a hunched back or a withered arm. Charles is far too amiable and nice to do unpleasant things unless he is driven to them by force of circumstances. He is built on sand, and you cannot expect him to withstand a storm. When one considers the family characteristics, the fact that he was ridiculously spoilt as a boy, and his natural tendencies to selfishness fostered in every way, I must say he is not so bad. I fully expect to hear before long that he has justified my estimate of him and rehabilitated himself financially by some simple, if unexpected means."

Harry listened to this exposition of his father's character with great interest. He had learned not a little lately, and was picking up more.

"But he forged your name." His face burned, and he looked away.

"You must not apply ordinary standards to him. One need not necessarily dislike a person because one ceases to respect him. Of course, that *was*

inexcusable—but he did it in the nicest way possible, and only because he considered he was compelled. I assure you that from a purely personal aspect I think he is quite an attractive individual—at least, I have always found him so.”

“He ill-treated mother,” put in Harry.

“They never should have married—but he did not actively ill-treat her——”

“The cruelty proved against him* in the case ——”

“Specially prepared for the occasion, and purely imaginary.”

“Uncle Henry!” gasped the boy. This was news to him.

“He neglected her, and failed to make her happy. But no one who knew him ever supposed he would, and he never struck her, or anything of that kind.”

“Then——” Harry commenced in a bewildered tone.

“It is far better they should be apart.”

“Yes,” the boy muttered, “I see.”

“The fact of his infidelity—I am speaking to you as a man—does not distinguish him from a goodly number of his set, and, in itself, was also a natural consequence of his upbringing.”

“If Leonardson was so keen to be revenged,” Harry asked, as a new thought struck him, “why didn’t he bring out about the manufactured evidence?”

“His own share in the transaction might also have transpired, and he could scarcely afford to face the cross-examination which must have ensued if he appeared at all. You see, he is now engaged on the task of winning a position in that section of the

community which you and I have both abandoned—if you can be said to have abandoned what you never started. You can gauge the value of what we lose from the fact that he will have no difficulty in succeeding. It is only a question of bidding against prejudices which barely exist nowadays.”

“And he can bid high enough,” commented Harry.

“Precisely. But we are not concerned with him any more. I wish him joy of his purchase. There are few houses which will remain closed to him, but he may find the realisation of his ambition less delightful than he expects—unless he is quite inordinately pachydermatous. People will accept his hospitality, voyage on his yacht, shoot over his moors, drink his rare vintages, ride his horses, accept his friendship, to his face; but, all the time, though they may fear him for his power and envy him for his money, they will sneer behind his back; and should the lever which raised him snap—and he lose his gold—how many of his new friends will lift one finger to help him?”

“When father’s examination in bankruptcy is held, won’t it come out that Leonardson is responsible for it?” Harry asked.

“I mentioned the point to Mr. Brabourne the other day, when he was talking about your father, and I understand Leonardson holds some kind of incriminating document your father gave him when this plot was concocted. He requested Mr. Brabourne to let me know. We are not enemies, Charles and I, though I draw the line at meeting him.”

“He is too ‘cute for father,” was Harry’s comment.

Lord D'Enville went on : " I fancy Leonardson knows how to play that sort of hand. He started life as a pawnbroker's assistant."

" How in the world do you know that ? By Jove ! he is not doing badly."

" It is curious what a small world it is. His secretary, by name Haig, who is as secretive as a mole, let it out one day when he thought he was alone. Mrs. Haig, who heard it, is my bailiff's sister, and he happened to tell me as a piece of information which might be interesting owing to Leonardson's present notoriety. It will afford me the greater amusement in following his career."

" Can't we give it out—— ? " began the boy.

" Certainly not. No one would mind if we did. I hate spoiling a joke," Lord D'Enville cut in with a sarcastic laugh.

Harry did not answer this, but his eyes were grave, and he was evidently turning something over in his mind.

" I am sorry," resumed his uncle, " you won't play against Harrow and get your eleven, but you will see from what I have said that there may be advantages even in that. A fellow can't learn too young."

" Yes, I see," Harry responded again. " But, uncle, I did not realise what it meant to mother to give up her life."

" She has already begun to be glad. Leonardson exercised some evil fascination over her—he is a personality, besides his money. But she never liked him in her heart. A man of no birth or breeding requires certain qualities to supply their place which Mr. Leonardson lacks."

"I dare say he won't find it all jam, then," Harry observed.

"We need not bother our heads over him, at any rate," Lord D'Enville added. "There are other things to think about. But now we must go back to your mother. I see we are nearly home."

CHAPTER XXIV

The Leonardson town mansion was *en vogue*. The owner, with urbane and smiling courtesy, entertained various of his "intimates" to dinner previous to a reception at the Styrian Embassy, which it was understood, would be graced by Royalty. The Mulfords were there, indeed, Lady Mulford, to please her husband occupied the opposite end of the table to their host. Other personalities, including Lord Mulford's young nephew the Duke of Southerley, lent dignity to the feast—the list was public property the next morning. The acting hostess might have been noticed, by a close observer to derive a certain humorous interest from the whole proceeding which could not be adequately explained by the conversation of either Lord Frankote—whose sole topics were yachting and shares—or her husband's young nephew who had fallen a victim, across the footlights to the charms of Miss Clare Fitz-Nevil and was unable to divest his mind or his talk of this all-absorbing fact. Indeed, he regarded it as no slight hardship that this dinner prevented him attending at the shrine— or, in other words, occupying his usual stall at the theatre. The fact that the lady in question treated him as an infant-in-arms was no deterrent.

The observer referred to would be correct, for

Lady Mulford's mind reverted, with an invincible curiosity, to speculating on her host's real feelings—so well hidden by the swarthy and genial mask behind which his undeniably powerful intellect revolved and worked out his individual problems. She was fairly well posted in the facts regarding the D'Envilles, but it did not concern her personally. She came to please her husband not Mr. Leonardson, and she had learnt long ago the folly of interfering in other people's quarrels unless absolutely compelled. Such was her view, and she always found it satisfactory.

Meanwhile it amused her to be here with a knowledge of those recent happenings, which the financier could hardly have forgotten, and yet gave no sign of. She described the dinner to Maie D'Enville in a letter that very night.

"You will probably be interested to hear of our dinner party," she wrote, "as you may now be expected to take a quite dispassionate interest in the progress of your 'tiger.' Several people asked after you, and he contrived each time, with consummate cleverness, to say nothing definite. Did I tell you that when Kirby described Harry's meeting with his father at the theatre, I made him promise to keep it to himself? Anyhow, I did, and my delightful but undeniably stupid worser half has only a glimmering of a notion that there has been trouble at all—which is brilliant even for him! Accordingly, he seems to have somewhat embarrassed Mr. L. by well-meant but scarcely tactful questions about the Klangor mine and Charles D'Enville's bankruptcy—which, as you know, is reported in this evening's papers—after

we left the dining-room. His own story is that Leonardson seemed to have made 'the deuce' of a mess of that beastly mine, and might have given Charles a leg-up in spite of the way the latter treated you! People do not seem to associate the two petitions at present, though what they may do eventually is another thing. I expect it is a case of the weaker going to the wall. You understand, Maie, why I do not drop the man. He is nothing to me—but these coal-fields naturally are important to us, and I make a point of helping John when I can. I should not write this if I was not aware that you regard the whole episode as a leaf of your book which is not only turned over, but also recognised as the cause of your present contentment.

"The reception our host met with at the Embassy afterwards would have rejoiced Lord D'Enville's heart. I wish he could have been there! Those men who don't want anything out of the money machine inclined to be supercilious—the rest fawning! As for the women—my dear, you are well out of it. In my *role* of disinterested onlooker it affords me infinite entertainment—but I thank Heaven I have acquired sufficient philosophy to enable me to sustain the above *role*. The anxiety of a mother who took an active interest in her daughter's chance of success would wear me to a shadow! Once they are satisfied as to the reality of the cash—it reminds me of a football match at Eton! Fortunately I never deceived myself into imagining I should have the smallest say in Florence's choice of a victim—that is what he will be—and, upon my word, I believe if she took a fancy to the 'tiger'—I am not sure that John would object—she would cut his

claws for him ! Do you remember a gossip we once had on the subject ?

" Give my love to Harry. When I want a holiday—a real holiday—I shall come and stay with you. I saw plainly enough, when we met at Eton the other day, that you have found out the value of our vortex and won't return to it again. Send me some of your news, and what your plans are.

" Yours most affectionately,
" CONNIE."

When Lady Mulford finished her letter she read it through, and remained for a minute or two lost in meditation. Then she murmured, half aloud.

" Maie has got over her tearing by the tiger's claws marvellously. It was pretty severe treatment—but salutary. At any rate, I am glad—also, it is a good thing to know a person well enough to tell them the truth. She is a dear. I wonder how many of my friends I could have written to like that in a similar case ? "

More shaken than he would have admitted by the public examination of his affairs, which he had attended that day, Charles D'Enville made his way, after a solitary dinner and some hours of thought, to the house in Kensington wherein Miss Fitz-Neval—as we have seen—defied the tongues of her neighbours. He had come to a conclusion, during his meal and the subsequent cogitation, which he now proceeded to carry into effect. Despite the easy grace of his manner in court, the effort required to refrain from implicating Leonardson and thereby bringing upon himself still worse trouble, coupled with the odious curiosity of the vulgar crowd, told

its tale in the droop of his head and the drag of his step. Nevertheless, his wonted self-complacency sustained him sufficiently to prevent any immoderate dejection of spirit. The cheery optimism of an utterly selfish man with a good digestion remains proof against shocks which would pierce any less impenetrable armour. He was not disappointed of his greeting here, at least. Clare Fitz-Nevil's welcome fell on his sores like balm, and he told himself he had decided well. There is no doubt that he also became firmly convinced, within a very short time, that he had always intended to act in the way he now proceeded to. A convenient memory frequently attends an amenable conscience.

"Poor old thing," said Clare, "you must be worn out."

She set to work to make him comfortable, brought his slippers and a smoking-coat, and poured him out a whiskey and soda precisely as he liked it. The room, with its air of untidy comfort, soothed him, and his self-sufficiency returned.

He lay back luxuriously in his chair, and beckoned Clare with a gracious gesture to come and occupy the arm.

"We've been pals a long time," he said, taking her hand, "and you still have some little regard for me?"

"Oh, Charles," Clare responded, her whole simple heart in her voice. There was no need to say more, and he experienced a sensation of righteousness and real worth—most comforting after the severe handling he had undergone during the two episodes when the hard light of publicity was thrown on to his affairs.

"I fear I am scarcely what would be called wealthy nowadays," he remarked, after a pause, to allow the grateful unction to flow into the now rapidly healing wounds.

The answering gleam which sprang into her eyes, and illumined her whole countenance occasioned him some bewilderment. It was scarcely the reception one would commonly expect to such a disclosure, but Clare had more than once astonished him. He concluded, when these incidents occurred, that her humble origin was responsible for such eccentricities.

"How much have you got?" she inquired, her voice curiously anxious.

"Perhaps three hundred a year. My ahem! late wife proposed I should accept a third of the income from the marriage settlement, which would make it up to five hundred alto—"

He stopped in some dismay as he observed the effect of this statement on his companion.

"No, no," she muttered; "not from her."

"Er—what did you say?"

"You won't want it, Charles," her expression changed again to one of conscious pride. "I am not exactly a pauper. I am so glad you haven't more than that."

"Glad?" he inquired.

"When you are free from—her—and we are married——"

He raised a finger in modest deprecation. "I have nothing to offer you now."

"Oh, Charles!" she said. To his amazement a faint blush spread over her face. It came upon him that here was some extraordinary emotion which he was immune from. It required a moment or two

before he remembered that his superior breeding must be accountable.

"It is only a trifle to what you ought to have--to what you would have had for this new trouble. We shan't be rich like that, but—" She leant over and whispered in his ear.

"Not really!" he ejaculated. "By Gad! you are a marvel, Clare. He had time to remind himself that he had come to the house prepared to marry her before he knew the actual total of her savings. The reflection completely restored his habitual belief in his own disinterestedness.

"I hoped that--something of this sort would happen," she resumed. "I never would tell you. And now," she clapped her rather large white hands like a child who is enjoying a long-expected treat and finds anticipation justified, "you needn't worry any more, need you?"

"Upon my soul, I don't deserve it," he exclaimed, springing out of his chair. Her simple delight at being permitted to provide him with an income larger than he had ever possessed before permeated -- for a moment--even through the veil behind which such feelings as shame and manliness lay withering from disuse.

"How like you, Charles! But who does, if not you?"

"I swear I will make you a good husband," he cried then. "You are the most generous creature I ever saw--and I don't believe you realise it."

"It is you who are good to me," she answered ingenuously as a girl. She moved up to him and put her hands on his shoulders with a tender gesture. "Are you sure you won't regret it?"

To her eyes he seemed the noblest and best of men as he drew her to him and kissed her.

"You ought to wear a halo," he remarked.

It was some half-hour later that she shyly unlocked her bureau, and, keeping her head averted, asked:

"It is only three months more, Charles. Don't you think we may as well begin to spend our income now?"

"Um—ah—there certainly seems no valid objection, but what exactly——"

The sentence was not concluded, for she turned quickly and handed him a slip of paper.

It had a familiar appearance. He glanced at it, and perceived that the amount was five hundred pounds. Once more his mind turned with satisfaction to the thought that he had come determined to marry her--that, indeed, he had never intended to do anything else.

CHAPTER XXV

Seated on a coach on the rising ground to the left of the pavilion at Lords', Harry and his mother watched Eton struggling for victory in the great annual encounter with Harrow. Though still weak, the boy had insisted on accepting the Larkings' invitation and coming up for a few hours to see his school play. Hubert Larking, in accordance with expectations, had secured his place in the eleven, and his father signalled the fact by the acquirement of this commanding position in the ring, from which he hoped to cheer his son's efforts.

It was Saturday morning, and Eton, with a lead of a hundred and fifty, had two men out in the second innings. Harry was able to climb up to a place on the front seat without assistance, and, once there, he thoroughly enjoyed himself. Mr. and Mrs. Larking beamed promiscuously on the whole of creation, for Hubert had made seventy runs and was still in. The day was perfect, and the ground presented that animated appearance characteristic of the occasion. The smartest of summer frocks, the most shiny of top-hats, abounded in every direction.

Certain youthful enthusiasts, with their relations, spurred to interest by contagion, followed each ball with whole-hearted relish or disapproval, as the case might be, and the pavilion sheltered many

stalwarts—to whom the game might bring back personal memories of triumph or failure as poignant almost as on the day they took place.

But the majority—must it be said the large majority?—of the company present placed cricket ~~at~~ ^{an} appreciable distance down the list of attractions, perhaps to be accounted merely the necessary *raison d'être* for the whole affair, which had no importance in itself.

Such an opportunity to see old friends ; such an easy method of providing hospitality in the form of luncheons and teas ; such a pleasing panorama of beauty and youth. The never-ceasing strain of humanity wandering aimlessly round and round the asphalt path which surrounds the ground, with occasional pauses to greet acquaintances, bear eloquent witness to the fact that its component parts are here for any purpose save to watch boys battle for runs or wickets in the arena.

There must be some cause for the presence of the audience—the game only affords the excuse—for surely several hundred human beings can derive only the smallest satisfaction from parading, on a hot day and a hard path, with nothing to look at but each other ? Food, frocks and flirtations play some small part, and the love of being in a crowd, especially what purports to be a fashionable crowd. Then “ she ” may be there, or “ he,” and the same crowd provides cover for many a purely “ haphazard ” meeting.

At any rate, probably a remarkably low percentage were interested to know that H. Larking—number 2 on the scoring-board—had reached the fine score of eighty runs to his own bat, except the occupants of the coach we have visited, the veterans

of the pavilion, and a fair number of those persons in the two front rows of the covered stands, also a compact group of boys in the Eton stand, with light blue favours and shrill voices and ready palms for applause. Those contemporaries in the adjoining stand, whose dark blue ribbons mark their Harrovian origin, also displayed interest, but, for the nonce, chiefly of a passive order.

Harry's intense absorption in the fate of each particular ball was undisturbed by either the running comments of Mr. Larking or the fatuous remarks of that gentleman's estimable wife.

The latter was somewhat perturbed. Her innate kindness of heart had been in severe conflict with her equally innate principles. The former had achieved a victory, but at some cost ; for she could not quite reconcile the fact that Mrs. D'Enville had been in the divorce court with the fact that she was now on Mr. Larking's coach.

But suddenly an end came to both Mrs. Larking's meanderings and Harry's concentration. A roar burst from the crowd—a roar which owed the major portion of its volume to the lately subdued occupants of the Harrow stand. Larking had been bowled by a yorker with his score at 92. After a moment the roar was taken up by the rival section of the spectators—intensified by the fact that the hero of the moment had missed his century by so few. Mr. Larking and Harry, elated at Hubert's success, and at the same time lamenting the want of those eight runs which would have made so much difference, descended to find him ; and Harry, walking with a stick, met many school friends, who commiserated him on his bad luck in getting ill, and hoped he was all right again.

Hubert wore a becoming air of modesty at his triumph—though also regretful on the matter of those eight runs. Attired in a light blue cap and a blazer of white flannel with a light blue edging to it, his trousers still creased where the pads had pressed them, he was regarded with admiration and awe as the hero of the moment. Many small boys nudged their sisters or parents, and muttered, "That's Larking," as he passed across the small space between the pavilion and the coach. Some distance away from this vehicle Harry saw that somebody was talking to his mother. Two men in front were watching the game, peering between the canopy of the stand and the heads of those sitting under it. Recognising one as Lord Mulford, he quickened his pace to speak to him, and noticed that the other was a prominent cabinet minister. Then, suddenly, he caught sight of the mother's face. It reminded him of the time when she had left him after their disagreement at Eton. The other occupants of the coach were not attending to her, the seat by her side, lately occupied by Harry, being vacant. Mrs. Larking, it is true, kept a curious corner of her eye on the men (she recognised the minister from his photographs) as she talked effusively to a neighbour.

When Harry realised who the third man was—he had his back to the game, and was speaking earnestly up to Mrs. D'Enville—he went as white as a sheet. Not yet strong after his illness, the shock was a severe one, but he managed to pull himself together, and went on with a grim look on his face and a firmly set jaw.

Just after he and Mr. Larking left the coach to fetch Hubert, Lord Mulford, the cabinet minister,

and Howard Leonardson strolled up. The former was ignorant of the extent of the rupture between his cousin and the financier, although he had gathered from his wife that something was amiss. Seeing Maie D'Enville alone on the front seat he thought he was displaying some tact in providing a chance of reconciliation by leaving the two together. Accordingly, when he had said a word or two he turned to watch the game with his other companion, moving on round the ground just as Harry was coming up.

Howard Leonardson's bearing had improved noticeably since the night he first dined at the D'Envilles' flat some six months before. The effect was as though many coats of varnish had been added to a veneer, and transformed it to lacquer. The suggestion of assertiveness had merged into self-assurance, and he no longer indulged in that significant gesture, with the palms of his hands spread upwards, which Maie D'Enville originally noticed and determined to correct.

His clothes fitted exactly, and there was no appearance of being overdressed—the skill of Charles D'Enville's tailor being responsible for this—while he preserved the aroma of affluence which always emanates in some mysterious manner from the very rich.

When Harry first realised his presence Leonardson was speaking in a low, intense voice to Mrs. D'Enville. The sight of her had moved him unexpectedly. The insult of his dismissal, and the subsequent smarting injury to his self-esteem had not eliminated his old feeling for her, and this sudden meeting brought back with a rush the same physical infatuation she used to inspire.

As for her, she could only gaze helplessly, frightened and dismayed at his proximity. It recalled overpoweringly his curious ascendancy over her. The emotion was transitory, but keen for the instant, and, while it lasted, she had not the strength to think collectedly.

It was worth one more effort to Leonardson. He was speaking in a low tone, intent on his object and oblivious of all else. She might be broken, he thought, by the prospect of poverty, and willing now to hear him.

"You would not care to reconsider matters?" he asked. "I will renew my offer."

Harry's mother did not answer for a while, the feelings inspired by the situation held her still silent. But she saw her son coming up—he was some fifty yards away. Mrs. Larking's eye was upon her at the moment. The crowd passed slowly round underneath, almost brushing past Leonardson as he leant on the front of the coach. His face and manner gave no sign of the nature of his words, and she must not let her dismay appear. It cost her a great effort to reply.

"I have nothing else to say to you."

Just then a applause broke out at some incident of the game, and everyone looked up to see what had happened. Leonardson took advantage of the general movement to repeat his question in a stronger form.

"Have you forgotten the yacht and that night at the party? Think what I can give you. Your boy is ill, I hear. I can pay for the best of doctors. I am a power already in your world—I shall be a greater one. You are poor—but I can make you rich beyond your dreams. Hear me, Maie. What

I have done is because you spurned me. I can see you have suffered. Put an end to it. Be sensible, and come to me. I love you," he went on fervently, seeing that she did not stop him; "we will forget this stupid quarrel. What do you say?" In his eagerness he had raised his voice a little, and Mrs. D'Enville glanced round nervously. However, the others were talking, and noticed nothing remarkable. Harry was almost up to them now, walking stiffly, his young face set and white. She turned back to Leonardson with a half smile on her face, and he, misreading its meaning, found encouragement.

Putting his hand up, he caught hold of the rail round the seat, and was about to mount to the box beside her.

"May I come up?" he inquired masterfully.

"You had better go—go!" she said at last, "if you don't want a scene! I hate and loathe you," she went on, "and despise you—go!" She leant forward and spoke in almost a whisper. A few people saw her face, and wondered at the intensity of its expression, but it was not their business, and they passed on. Another burst of cheering came as Harry tapped Leonardson on the arm.

The financier turned in surprise, which increased when he saw who stood by him.

The boy was quite calm. This moment was sweet. He had caught his mother's last words, and, instinctively, he wished to avoid a fuss. Still, he must say a word or two to show this beast what he thought of him.

"Hadn't you better do as you are told?" he inquired.

Now, Leonardson was at a disadvantage. He

still clung to the idea that Mrs. D'Enville might be going to make it up with him.

"I am speaking to your mother," he said coldly.

"And I am speaking for her." He looked up, and she nodded. Mr. Larking and Hubert were by his side, watching the scene with grave, rather anxious faces. "If you don't go, you scheming blackguard, I shall kick you off the ground."

Leonardson's eyes blazed. He clenched and half raised his fist, but Harry only smiled quietly. Then the financier conquered his rage sufficiently to speak. He was used to violent scenes, and on principle never yielded to impulse.

"You shall pay for this," he muttered between his teeth.

"Good-bye," said Harry.

The other raised his head and looked again at Mrs. D'Enville. She was regarding Harry with admiring eyes, but turned at Leonardson's movement and looked at him.

"Please don't trouble to wait," she said, entering into Harry's mood.

The two Larkings still watched with grave faces. The matter seemed too serious for them to affect to make light of it, and their antagonism to Leonardson was written plainly for him to read.

"You shall pay for this too," he flung at them, as he at length moved slowly away.

"I don't know precisely what you have done, Mr. Leonardson, but I have no doubt it is a dirty enough trick," said Mr. Larking in a cold voice; "I know you of old."

Leonardson snarled and turned his back. In another few seconds he passed from their sight in the crowd.

"Good riddance of bad rubbish!" ejaculated Harry, clambering up on to the seat by his mother, with a helping lift from Hubert. "Why, what's the matter?" he demanded. Mrs. D'Enville was leaning back in her seat, with all the colour gone from her face.

"I shall be better in a minute," she said, smiling rather wanly at him. "It was unexpected—seeing him."

"Well, it's the last time, I hope. You are the invalid now. I shall have to take you in hand," he rejoined cheerily. The encounter had done him good, and he felt like a fighting-cock who had vanquished his adversary in fair combat.

They stayed for the rest of the day, and saw Eton snatch a victory five minutes before time—chiefly owing to Hubert's fine innings and two brilliant catches he brought off subsequently. Mr. Larking was in the heights of bliss, and his wife showered incoherent words of congratulation and delight on all and sundry.

"What a pity your uncle didn't come," she said to Harry; "he would enjoy seeing his old friends again, and Hubert catching such splendid centuries—or missing them or something."

Hubert laughed.

"They are rather easy to miss, mater, I find," he put in.

"Never mind, you made ninety-two runs, my boy; I know I am all right there," she said proudly. "The top score on the side, and a magnificent inning—I heard——"

"Innings," corrected her husband, smiling.

"I'm sure it was a good one, anyhow," she went on, undisturbed by her technical errors,

"and bowled by a boy from Yorkshire at the end."

Everyone laughed at this, and the good lady wondered what amused them.

"She means a 'yorker,'" exclaimed Hubert to the world at large, as the party moved away from the coach.

That night Mr. Laiking gave a large and early dinner, followed by a theatre. Several of Hubert's and Harry's Eton friends were there, and Harry was allowed to take part in the proceedings—on condition he took things easily and did not go on to supper.

The next day he and his mother spent quietly in town, travelling down on the Monday to Stokely D'Enville, where Lord D'Enville had arranged for them to stay till their plans were settled.

